4.4.22.

From the Library of

Professor Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

Bequeathed by him to

the Library of

Princeton Theological Seminary

PR4950
.E68

OWEN MEREDITH'S POEMS.

FROM THE LONDON PRESS.

"THE gossip of the literary world long ago revealed that the *nom de plume* of 'Owen Meredith' but lightly veiled the reality of 'Robert Bulwer Lytton.' Something of Saxon strength lends nerve and muscle to his line, and the grand old Saxon music echoes in his strains."—*Literary Gazette.*

"Some of the poems match in beauty of language and grace of thought with such masterpieces of music as Herrick's, Carew's, Marvel's, Tennyson's, Moore's, or Edgar Poe's. . . . . Every way this volume is remarkable."—*Athenæum.*

"It is not often in the present dull and prosaic times that we meet with a volume of such elegant and original poetry. . . . . The more Mr. Owen Meredith is read and understood, so much the more will he be pronounced to be one of the very best poets—if not the best—of the present age."—*Bell's Messenger.*

"If passion, and fervour, and intellect, ever renewing the beautiful even in the shadow of suffering, and language rippling musically up to the marge of rhyme as waves break in murmurs on the beach, be indications of the true poet, we have them all here."—*Critic.*

"To describe them honestly is to declare that they are the best things of their kind that have come before the public for many a day. Some of them are exquisite in the extreme, displaying a fine sensibility and a thorough knowledge of human nature."—*Morning Chronicle.*

POEMS

BY

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
APR 4 1922
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

OWEN MEREDITH.

E. R. Bulwer-Lytton,
1st earl of Lytton

THE WANDERER

AND

CLYTEMNESTRA.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
M DCCC LIX.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
PRINTED BY H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

CONTENTS.

Page

DEDICATION. To J. F. ..... ix.
Prologue. Part I. 17
Part II. 25
Part III. 28

BOOK I. IN ITALY.

The Magic Land 35
Desire 36
Fatality 39
A Vision 40
Eros 42
Indian Love Song 43
Morning and Meeting 45
The Cloud 47
Root and Leaf 47
Warnings 48
A Fancy 51
Once 53
Since 56
A Love Letter 58
Condemned Ones 64
The Storm 66
The Vampyre 69
Change 71
A Chain to Wear 75
Silence 75
News 78
Count Rinaldo Rinaldi 79
The Last Message 82
Venice 84
On the Sea 85

BOOK II. IN FRANCE.

"Prensus in Ægæo" 89
A l'Entresol 91
Terra Incognita 94
A Remembrance 97
Madame la Marquise 98

Page
The Novel..... 101
Aux Italiens..... 103
Progress..... 107
The Portrait..... 108
Astarte..... 111
At Home during the Ball..... 113
At Home after the Ball..... 116
Au Café * * * 119
The Chess-Board..... 130
Song..... 131
The Last Remonstrance..... 132
Sorcery. To —— 135
Adieu, Mignonne, ma Belle..... 137
To Mignonne 138
Compensation..... 141
Translations from Peter Ronsard:
"Voici le Bois que ma Saincte Angelette".. 142
"Cache pour cette Nuict"..... 143
"Page suy Moy"..... 143
"Les Espices sont à Ceres"..... 144
"Ma Douce Jouvence"..... 144

BOOK III. IN ENGLAND.

The Aloe..... 146
"Medio de Fonte Leporum"..... 149
The Death of King Hacon..... 150
"Carpe Diem"..... 152
The Fount of Truth..... 153
Midges..... 157
The last Time that I met Lady Ruth..... 160
Matrimonial Counsels..... 161
Sea-Saw..... 163
Babylonia..... 165

BOOK IV. IN SWITZERLAND.

The Heart and Nature..... 172
A Quiet Moment..... 174
Næniæ..... 176

BOOK V. IN HOLLAND.

Autumn..... 180
Leafless Hours..... 180
On my Twenty-fourth Year..... 181
Jacqueline..... 183

Page
Macromicros 188
Mystery 190
The Canticle of Love 198
The Peddler 200
A Ghost Story 202
Small People 203
Metempsychosis 204
To the Queen of Serpents 205
Bluebeard 206
Fatima 207
Going back again 207
The Castle of King Macbeth 208
Death-in-Life 209
King Limos 209
The Fugitive 211
The Shore 212
The North Sea 214
A Night in the Fisherman's Hut:
Part I.—The Fisherman's Daughter 217
Part II.—The Legend of Lord Rosencrantz ... 220
Part III.—Daybreak 223
Part IV.—Breakfast 225
A Dream 227
King Solomon 228
Cordelia 231
"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified:" . 233
To Cordelia 237
A Letter to Cordelia 240
Failure 242
Misanthropos 243

BOOK VI. PALINGENESIS

A Prayer 248
Euthanasia 250
The Soul's Science 257
A Psalm of Confession 258
Requiescat 265

EPILOGUE.

Part I 266
Part II 270
Part III 275

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Clytemnestra 287
Good-Night in the Porch 378

Page
The Earl's Return..... 389
A Soul's Loss..... 415
The Artist..... 420
The Wife's Tragedy..... 427

MINOR POEMS.

The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere..... 450
A Sunset Fancy..... 459
Associations..... 461
Meeting again..... 462
Aristocracy..... 463
The Mermaiden..... 463
At her Casement..... 464
A Farewell..... 465
An Evening in Tuscany..... 465
Song..... 469
Sea-Side Songs. I..... 471
II..... 472
The Summer-Time that was..... 473
Elayne Le Blanc..... 474
To ——..... 482
Queen Guenevere..... 482
The neglected Heart..... 483
Appearances..... 485
How the Song was made..... 486
Retrospections..... 486
Thy Voice across my Spirit falls..... 487
The ruined Palace..... 488
A Vision of Virgins..... 488
Leoline..... 492
Spring and Winter..... 494
King Hermandiaz..... 496
Song..... 497
The Swallow..... 498
Contraband..... 498
Evening..... 499
Adon..... 500
The Prophet..... 501
Wealth..... 501
Want..... 501
A Bird at Sunset..... 502
In Travel..... 503
Changes..... 505
Judicium Paridis..... 506
Night..... 513
Song..... 513
Forbearance..... 514

THE WANDERER.

DEDICATION.

TO J. F.

As, in the laurel's murmurous leaves
'Twas fabled, once, a Virgin dwelt;
Within the poet's page yet heaves
The poet's Heart, and loves or grieves
Or triumphs, as it felt.

A human spirit here records
The annals of its human strife.
A human hand hath touch'd these chords.
These songs may all be idle words:
And yet—they once were life.

I gave my harp to Memory.
She sung of hope, when hope was young,
Of youth, as youth no more may be;
And, since she sung of youth, to thee,
Friend of my youth, she sung.

For all youth seeks, all manhood needs,
All youth and manhood rarely find:
A strength more strong than codes or creeds,
In lofty thoughts and lovely deeds
Reveal'd to heart and mind;

A staff to stay, a star to guide;
A spell to soothe, a power to raise;
A faith by fortune firmly tried;
A judgment resolute to preside
O'er days at strife with days.

O large in lore, in nature sound!
O man to me, of all men, dear!
All these in thine my life hath found,
And force to tread the rugged ground
Of daily toil, with cheer.

Accept—not these, the broken cries
Of days receding far from me—
But all the love that in them lies,
The man's heart in the melodies,
The man's heart honouring thee!

Sighing I sung; for some sublime
Emotion made my music jar:
The forehead of this restless time
Pales in a fervid, passionate clime,
Lit by a changeful star;

And o'er the Age's threshold, traced
In characters of hectic fire,
The name of that keen, fervent-faced
And toiling seraph, hath been placed,
Which men have call'd Desire.

But thou art strong where, even of old,
The old heroic strength was rare,
In high emotions self-controll'd,
And insight keen, but never cold,
To lay all falsehood bare;

Despising all those glittering lies
Which in these days can fool mankind;
But full of noble sympathies
For what is genuinely wise,
And beautiful, and kind.

And thou wilt pardon all the much
Of weakness which doth here abound,
Till music, little prized as such,

With thee find worth from one true touch
Of nature in its sound.

Tho' mighty spirits are no more,
Yet spirits of beauty still remain.
Gone is the Seer that, by the shore
Of lakes as limpid as his lore,
Lived to one ceaseless strain

And strenuous melody of mind.
But one there rests that hath the power
To charm the midnight moon, and bind
All spirits of the sweet south wind,
And steal from every shower

That sweeps green England cool and clear,
The violet of tender song.
Great Alfred! long may England's ear
His music fill, his name be dear
To English bosoms long!

And one . . . in sacred silence sheathed
That name I keep, my verse would shame.
The name my lips in prayer first breathed
Was his: and prayer hath yet bequeath'd
Its silence to that name;—

Which yet an age remote shall hear,
Borne on the fourfold wind sublime
By Fame, where, with some faded year
These songs shall sink, like leaflets sere,
In avenues of Time.

Love on my harp his finger lays;
His hand is held against the chords.
My heart upon the music weighs,
And, beating, hushes foolish praise
From desultory words:

And Childhood steals, with wistful grace,
'Twixt him and me; an infant hand
Chides gently back the thoughts that chase
The forward hour, and turns my face
To that remember d land

Of legend, and the Summer sky,
And all the wild Welsh waterfalls,
And haunts where he, and thou, and I
Once wander'd with the wandering Wye,
And scaled the airy walls

Of Chepstow, from whose ancient height
We watch'd the liberal sun go down;
Then onward, thro' the gradual night,
Till, ere the moon was fully bright,
We supp'd in Monmouth Town.

And tho', dear friend, thy love retains
The choicest sons of song in fee,
To thee not less I pour these strains,
Knowing that in thy heart remains
A little place for me.

Nor wilt thou all forget the time
Tho' it be past, in which together,
On many an eve, with many a rhyme
Of old and modern bards sublime
We soothed the summer weather:

And, citing all he said or sung
With praise reserved for bards like him,
Spake of that friend who dwells among
The Apennine, and there hath strung
A harp of Anakim;

Than whom a mightier master never
Touch'd the deep chords of hidden things;
Nor error did from truth dissever

With keener glance; nor made endeavour
To rise on bolder wings

In those high regions of the soul
Where thought itself grows dim with awe.
But now the star of eve hath stole
Thro' the deep sunset, and the whole
Of heaven begins to draw

The darkness round me, and the dew.
And my pale Muse doth fold her eyes.
Adieu, my friend; my guide, adieu!
May never night, 'twixt me and you,
With thoughts less fond arise!

THE AUTHOR.

FLORENCE, *Sept.* 24, 1857.

THE WANDERER.

PROLOGUE.

PART I.

Sweet are the rosy memories of the lips,
That first kiss'd ours, albeit they kiss no more:
Sweet is the sight of sunset-sailing ships,
Altho' they leave us on a lonely shore:
Sweet are familiar songs, tho' Music dips
Her hollow shell in Thought's forlornest wells:
And sweet, tho' sad, the sound of midnight bells,
When the oped casement with the night-rain drips.

There is a pleasure which is born of pain:
The grave of all things hath its violet.
Else why, thro' days which never come again,
Roams Hope with that strange longing, like Regret?
Why put the posy in the cold dead hand?
Why plant the rose above the lonely grave?
Why bring the corpse across the salt sea-wave?
Why deem the dead more near in native land?

Thy name hath been a silence in my life
So long, it falters upon language now,
O more to me than sister or than wife
Once . . . and now—nothing! It is hard to know

That such things have been, and are not, and yet
Life loiters, keeps a pulse at even measure,
And goes upon its business and its pleasure,
And knows not all the depths of its regret.

Thou art not in thy picture, O my friend!
The years are sad and many since I saw thee,
And seem with me to have survived their end.
Far otherwise than thus did memory draw thee!
I ne'er shall know thee other than thou wast.
Yet save, indeed, the same sad eyes of old,
And that abundant hair's warm silken gold,
Thou art changed, if this be like the look thou hast.

Changed! There the epitaph of all the years
Was sounded! I am changed too. Let it be.
Yet is it sad to know my latest tears
Were faithful to a memory,—not to thee.
Nothing is left us! nothing—save the soul.
Yet even the immortal in us alters too.
Who is it his old sensations can renew?
Slowly the seas are changed. Slow ages roll

The mountains to a level. Nature sleeps,
And dreams her dream, and to new work awakes,
After a hundred years are in the deeps.
But Man is changed before a wrinkle breaks
The brow's sereneness, or the curls are gray.
We stand within the flux of sense: the near
And far change place: and we see nothing clear.
That's false to-morrow which was true to-day.

Ah, could the memory cast her spots, as do
The snake's brood theirs in spring! and be once more
Wholly renew'd, to dwell i' the time that's new,
With no reiterance of those pangs of yore.
Peace, peace! My wild song will go wandering
Too wantonly, down paths a private pain

Hath trodden bare. What was it jarr'd the
strain ?
Some crusht illusion, left with crumpled wing

Tangled in Music's web of twinéd strings—
That started that false note, and crack'd the tune
In its beginning. Ah, forgotten things
Stumble back strangely ! and the ghost of June
Stands by December's fire, cold, cold ! and puts
The last spark out.
How could I sing aright
With those old airs haunting me all the night
And those old steps that sound when daylight shuts ?

For back she comes, and moves reproachfully,
The mistress of my moods, and looks bereft
(Cruel to the last !) as tho' 'twere I, not she,
That did the wrong, and broke the spell, and left
Memory comfortless.
Away ! away !
Phantoms, about whose brows the bindweed
clings,
Hopeless regret !
In thinking of these things
Some men have lost their minds, and others may.

Yet, oh, for one deep draught in this dull hour !
One deep, deep draught of the departed time !
Oh, for one brief strong pulse of ancient power,
To beat and breathe thro' all the valves of rhyme !
Thou, Memory, with the downward eyes, that art
The cupbearer of gods, pour deep and long,
Brim all the vacant chalices of song
With health ! Droop down thine urn. I hold my
heart.

One draught of what I shall not taste again,
Save when my brain with thy dark wine is
brimm'd,—

One draught! and then straight onward, spite of pain,
And spite of all things changed, with gaze undimm'd,
Love's footsteps thro' the waning Past to explore
Undaunted; and to carve, in the wan light
Of Hope's last outposts, on Song's utmost height
The sad resemblance of an hour no more.

Midnight, and love, and youth, and Italy!
Love in the land where love most lovely seems!
Land of my love, tho' I be far from thee,
Lend, for love's sake, the light of thy moonbeams,
The spirit of thy cypress-groves, and all
Thy dark-eyed beauty, for a little while
To my desire. Yet once more let her smile
Fall o'er me: o'er me let her long hair fall,

The lady of my life, whose lovely eyes
Dreaming, or waking, lure me. I shall know her
By Love's own planet o'er her in the skies,
And Beauty's blossom in the grass below her!
Dreaming, or waking, in her soft, sad gaze
Let my heart bathe, as on that fated night
I saw her, when my life took in the sight
Of her sweet face for all its nights and days.

Her winsome head was bare: and she had twined
Thro' its rich curls wild red anemones.
One stream of her soft hair stray'd unconfined
Down her ripe cheek, and shadow'd her deep eyes.
The bunch of sword-grass fell from her loose hand.
Her modest foot beneath its snowy skirt
Peep'd, and the golden daisy was not hurt.
Stately, yet slight, she stood, as fairies stand.

Under the blesséd darkness unreproved
We were alone, in that best hour of time,

Which first reveal'd to us how much we loved,
'Neath the thick starlight. The young night sublime
Hung trembling o'er us. At her feet I knelt,
And gazed up from her feet into her eyes.
Her face was bow'd: we breath'd each other's sighs:
We did not speak: not move: we look'd: we felt.

The night said not a word. The breeze was dead.
The leaf lay without whispering on the tree,
As I lay at her feet. Droopt was her head:
One hand in mine: and one still pensively
Went wandering through my hair. We were together.
How? Where? What matter? Somewhere in a dream,
Drifting, slow drifting, down a wizard stream:
Whither? Together: then what matter whither?

It was enough for me to clasp her hand:
To blend with her love-looks my own: no more.
Enough (with thoughts like ships that cannot land,
Blown by faint winds about a magic shore)
To realize, in each mysterious feeling,
The droop of the warm cheek so near my own:
The cool white arm about my shoulder thrown:
Those exquisite frail feet, where I was kneeling.

How little know they life's divinest bliss,
That know not to possess and yet refrain!
Let the young Psyche roam, a fleeting kiss:—
Grasp it—a few poor grains of dust remain.
See how those floating flowers, the butterflies,
Hover the garden thro', and take no root!
Desire forever hath a flying foot.
Free pleasure comes and goes beneath the skies.

Close not thy hand upon the innocent joy
That trusts itself within thy reach. It may,

Or may not, linger. Thou canst but destroy
The wingéd wanderer. Let it go or stay.
Love thou the rose, yet leave it on its stem.
Think! Midas starved by turning all to gold.
Blesséd are those that spare, and that withhold.
Because the whole world shall be trusted them.

The foolish Faun pursues the unwilling Nymph
That culls her flowers beside the precipice,
Or dips her shining ankles in the lymph:
But, just when she must perish or be his,
Heaven puts an arm out. She is safe. The shore
Gains some new fountain; or the lilied lawn
A rarer sort of rose: but, ah, poor Faun!
To thee she shall be changed forevermore.

Chase not too close the fading rapture. Leave
To Love his long auroras, slowly seen.
Be ready to release, as to receive.
Deem those the nearest, soul to soul, between
Whose lips yet lingers reverence on a sigh.
Judge what thy sense can reach not, most thine own,
If once thy soul hath seized it. The unknown
Is life to love, religion, poetry.

The moon had set. There was not any light,
Save of the lonely legion'd watch-stars pale
In outer air, and what by fits made bright
Hot oleanders in a rosy vale
Search'd by the lamping fly, whose little spark
Went in and out, like passion's bashful hope.
Meanwhile the sleepy globe began to slope
A ponderous shoulder sunward thro' the dark,

And the night pass'd in beauty like a dream.
Aloof in those dark heavens paused Destiny,
With her last star descending in the gleam
Of the cold morrow, from the emptied sky.

The hour, the distance from her old self, all
  The novelty and loneness of the place,
  Had left a lovely awe on that fair face,
And all the land grew strange and magical.

As droops some billowing cloud to the crouch'd hill,
  Heavy with all heaven's tears, for all earth's care,
She droop'd unto me, without force or will,
  And sank upon my bosom, murmuring there
A woman's inarticulate, passionate words.
  O moment of all moments upon earth!
  O life's supreme! How worth, how wildly worth,
Whole worlds of flame, to know this world affords

What even Eternity can not restore!
  When all the ends of life take hands, and meet
Round centres of sweet fire. Ah, never more,
  Ah never, shall the bitter with the sweet
Be mingled so in the pale after-years!
  One hour of life immortal spirits possess.
  This drains the world, and leaves but weariness,
And parching passion, and perplexing tears.

Sad is it, that we cannot even keep
  That hour to sweeten life's last toil: but Youth
Grasps all, and leaves us: and, when we would wee'd
  We dare not let our tears flow lest, in truth,
They fall upon our work which must be done.
  And so we bind up our torn hearts from breaking:
  Our eyes from weeping, and our brows from aching:
And follow the long pathway all alone.

O moment of sweet peril, perilous sweet!
  When woman joins herself to man; and man
Assumes the full-lived woman, to complete
  The end of life, since human life began!
When in the perfect bliss of union,
  Body and soul triumphal rapture claim,

When there's a spirit in blood, in spirit a flame,
And earth's lone hemispheres glow, fused in one!

Rare moment of rare peril! . . . . The bard's song,
The mystic's musing fancy. Did there ever
Two perfect souls, in perfect forms, belong
Perfectly to each other? Never, never!
Perilous were such moments, for a touch
Might mar their clear perfection. Exquisite
Even for the peril of their frail delight.
Such things man feigns: such seeks: but finds not such.

No! for 'tis in ourselves our love doth grow:
And, when our love is fully risen within us,
Round the first object doth it overflow,
Which, be it fair or foul, is sure to win us
Out of ourselves. We clothe with our own nature
The man or woman its first want doth find.
The leafless prop with our own buds we bind,
And hide in blossoms: fill the empty feature

With our own meanings: even prize defects
Which keep the mark of our own choice upon
The chosen: bless each fault whose spot protects
Our choice from possible confusion
With the world's other creatures: we believe them
What most we wish, the more we find they are not:
Our choice once made, with our own choice we war not:
We worship them for what ourselves we give them.

Doubt is this otherwise. . . . . When fate removes
The unworthy one from our reluctant arms,
We die with that lost love to other loves,
And turn to its defects from other charms.
And nobler forms, where moved those forms, may move

With lingering looks: our cold farewells we wave
them.
We loved our lost loves for the love we gave them,
And not for anything they gave our love.

Old things return not as they were in Time.
Trust nothing to the recompense of Chance,
Which deals with novel forms. This falling rhyme
Fails from the flowery steeps of old Romance,
Down that abyss which Memory droops above;
And, gazing out of hopelessness down there,
I see the shadow creep thro' Youth's gold hair,
And white Death watching over red-lipp'd Love.

PART II.

The soul lives on. What lives on with the soul?
Glimpses of something better than her best;
Truer than her truest: motion to a pole
Beyond the zones of this orb's dimness guest:
And (since life dies not with the first dead bliss)
Blind notions of some meaning moved thro' time,
Some purpose in the deeps of the sublime,
That stirs a pulse here, could we find out this.

Visions and noises rouse us. I discern
Even in change some comfort, O Belov'd!
Suns rise and set; stars vanish and return;
But never quite the same. And life is moved
Toward new experience. Every eve and morn
Descends and springs with increase on the world.
And what is death but life in this life furl'd?
The outward cracks, the inward life is born.

Friends pass beyond the borders of this Known,
And draw our thoughts up after them. We say
"They are: but their relations now are done

With Nature, and the plan of night and day.'
If never mortal man from this world's light
Did pass away to that surrounding gloom,
'Twere well to doubt the life beyond the tomb.
But now is Truth's dark side reveal'd to sight.

Father of spirits! Thine all secrets be.
I bless Thee for the light Thou hast reveal'd,
And that Thou hidest. Part of me I see,
And part of me Thy wisdom hath conceal'd,
Till the new life divulge it. Lord, imbue me
With will to work in this diurnal sphere,
Knowing myself my life's day-labourer here,
Where evening brings the day's work's wages to me.

I work my work. All its results are Thine.
I know the loyal deed becomes a fact
Which Thou wilt deal with: nor will I repine
Altho' I miss the value of the act.
Thou carest for the creatures: and the end
Thou seest. The world unto Thy hands I leave:
And to Thy hands my life. I will not grieve
Because I know not all Thou dost intend.

Something I know. Oft, shall it come about
When every heart is full with hope for man
The horizon straight is darken'd, and a doubt
Clouds all. The work the world so well began
Wastes down, and by some deed of shame is finish'd.
Ah yet, I will not be dismay'd: nor tho'
The good cause flourish fair, and Freedom flow
All round, my watch beyond shall be diminish'd.

What seem'd the triumph of the Fiend at length
Might be the effort of some dying Devil,
Permitted to put forth his fullest strength
To lose it all forever. While, the evil
Whose cloven crest our pœans float above
Might have been less than what unnoticed lies

'Neath our rejoicings. Which of us is wise?
We know not what we mourn: nor why we love.

But teach me, O Omnipotent, since strife,
Sorrow, and pain, are but occurrences
Of that condition thro' which flows my life,
Not part of me, the immortal, whom distress
Cannot retain, to vex not thought for these:
But to be patient, bear, forbear, restrain,
And hold my spirit pure above my pain.
No star that looks thro' life's dark lattices,

But what gives token of a world elsewhere.
I bless Thee for the loss of all things here
Which proves the gain to be: the hand of Care
That shades the eyes from earth, and beckons near
The rest which sweetens all: the shade Time throws
On Love's pale countenance, that he may gaze
Across Eternity for better days
Unblinded; and the wisdom of all woes:

I bless Thee for the life Thou gavest, albeit
It hath known sorrow: for the sorrow's self
I bless Thee; and the gift of wings to flee it,
Led by this spirit of song—this ministering elf,
That to sweet uses doth unwind my pain,
And spin his palace out of poison-flowers,
To float, an impulse, thro' the livelong hours,
From sky to sky, on Fancy's glittering skein.

Aid me, sweet Spirit, escaping from the throng
Of those that raise the Corybantic shout,
And barbarous, dissonant cymbal's clash prolong,
In fear lest any hear the God cry out,
Now that the night resumes her bleak retreat
In these dear lands, footing the unwander'd waste
Of Loss, to walk in Italy, and taste
A little while of what was once so sweet.

PART III.

Nurse of an ailing world, belovéd Night!
Our days are fretful children, weak to bear
A little pain: they wrangle, wound, and fight
Each other, weep, and sicken, and despair.
Thou, with thy motherly hand that healeth care,
Stillest our little noise: rebukest one,
Soothest another: blamest tasks undone:
Refreshest jaded hope; and teachest prayer.

Thine is the mother's sweet hush-hush, that stills
The flutterings of a plaintive heart to rest.
Thine is the mother's medicining hand that fills
Sleep's opiate: thine the mother's patient breast:
Thine, too, the mother's mute reproachful eyes,
That gently look our angry noise to shame
When all is done: we dare not meet their blame:
They are so silent, and they are so wise.

Thou that from this lone casement, while I write,
Seen in the shadowy upspring, swift dost post
Without a sound the polar star to light,
Not idly did the Chaldee shepherds boast
By thy stern lights man's life aright to read.
All day he hides himself from his own heart,
Swaggers and struts, and plays his foolish part:
Thou only seest him as he is indeed.

For who could feign false worth, or give the nod
Among his fellows, or this dust disown,
With nought between him and those lights of God,
Left awfully alone with the Alone?
Who vaunt high words, whose least heart's beating jars
The hush of sentinel worlds that take mute note
Of all beneath yon judgment plains remote?—
A universal cognizance of stars!

And yet, O gentlest angel of the Lord!
Thou leadest by the hand the artisan
Away from work. Thou bringest, on ship-board,
When gleam the dead-lights, to the lonely man
That turns the wheel, a blesséd memory
Of apple-blossoms, and the mountain vales
About his little cottage in Green Wales,
Miles o'er the ridges of the rolling sea.

Thou bearest divine forgiveness amongst men.
Relenting Anger pauses by the bed
Where Sleep looks so like Death. The absent then
Return; and Memory beckons back the dead.
Thou helpest home (thy balmy hand it is!)
The hard-work'd husband to the pale-cheek'd wife,
And hushest up the poor day's household strife,
On marriage pillows, with a good-night kiss.

Thou bringest to the wretched and forlorn
Woman, that down the glimmering bye-street hovers,
A dream of better days: the gleam of corn
About her Father's field, and her first lover's
Grave, long forgotten in the green churchyard:
Voices, long-still'd, from purer hours, before
The rushlight, Hope, went out; and, thro' the door
Of the lone garret, when the nights were hard,

Hunger, the wolf, put in his paw, and found her
Sewing the winding-sheet of Youth, alone;
And grip'd away the last cold comforts round her:—
Her little bed: the mean clothes she had on:
Her mother's picture—the sole saint she knew:
Till nothing else was left for the last crust
But the poor body, and the heart's young trust
In its own courage: and so these went too.

Home from the heated Ball flusht Beauty stands,
Musing beside her costly couch alone:
But while she loosens, faint, with jewell'd hands,
The diamonds from her dark hair, one by one,
Thou whisperest in her empty heart the name
Of one that died heart-broken for her sake
Long since, and all at once the coil'd hell-snake
Turns stinging in his egg,—and pomp is shame.

Thou comest to the man of many pleasures
Without a joy, that, soulless, plays for souls,
Whose life's a squander'd heap of plunder'd treasures,
While, listless loitering by, the moment rolls
From nothing on to nothing. From the shelf
Perchance he takes a cynic book. Perchance
A dead flower stains the leaves. The old romance
Returns. Ere morn, perchance, he shoots himself.

Thou comest, with a touch of scorn, to me,
That o'er the broken wine-cup of my youth
Sit brooding here, and pointest silently
To thine unchanging stars. Yes! yes! in truth,
They seem more reachless now than when of yore
Above the promist land I watcht them shine,
And all among their cryptic serpentine
Went climbing Hope, new planets to explore.

Not for the flesh that fades—altho' decay
This throng'd metropolis of sense o'erspread:
Not for the joys of youth, that fleet away
When the wise swallows to the south are fled;
Not that, beneath the law which fades the flower,
An earthly hope should wither in the cells
Of this poor earthly house of life, where dwells
Unseen the solitary Thinking-Power;

But that where fades the flower the weed should
flourish;
For all the baffled efforts to achieve
The imperishable from the things that perish,
For broken vows, and weaken'd will, I grieve.
Knowing that night of all is creeping on
Wherein can no man work, I sorrow most
For what is gain'd, and not for what is lost;
Nor mourn alone what's undone, but what's done.

What light, from yonder windless cloud releas'd,
Is widening up the peaks of yon black hills?
It is the full moon in the mystic east,
Whose coming half the unravisht darkness fills;
Till all among the ribb'd light cloudlets pale,
From shore to shore of sapphrine deeps divine,
The orbéd splendour seems to slide and shine
Aslope the rolling vapours in the vale.

Abroad the stars majestic light is flung,
And they fade brightening up the steps of Night.
Cold mysteries of the midnight! that, among
The sleeps and pauses of this world, in sight,
Reveal a doubtful hope to wild Desire;
Which, hungering for the sources of the suns,
Makes moan beyond the blue Septentrions,
And spidery Saturn in his webs of fire;

Whether the unconscious destinies of man
Move with the motions of your spheréd lights,
And his brief course, foredoom'd ere he began,
Your shining symbols fix'd in reachless heights,
Or whether all the purpose of his pain
Be shut in his wild heart and feverish will,
He knows no more than this:—that you are still,
But he is moved: he goes, but you remain.

Fool'd was the human vanity that wrote
Strange names in astral fire on yonder pole.

Who and what were they—in what age remote—
That scrawl'd weak boasts on yon siderial scroll?
Orion shines. Now seek for Nimrod. Where?
Osiris is a fable, and no more:
But Sirius burns as brightly as of yore.
There is no shade on Berenice's hair.

You that outlast the Pyramids, as they
Outlast their founders, tell us of our doom!
You that see Love depart, and Error stray,
And Genius toiling at a splendid tomb,
Like those Egyptian slaves: and Hope deceiv'd:
And Strength still failing when the goal is near:
And Passion parcht: and Rapture claspt to Fear:
And Trust betray'd: and Memory bereav'd!

Vain question! Shall some other voice declare
What my soul knows not of herself? Ah no!
Dumb patient Monster, grieving everywhere,
Thou answerest nothing which I did not know.
The broken fragments of ourselves we seek
In alien forms, and leave our lives behind.
In our own memories our graves we find.
And when we lean upon our hearts, they break.

I seem to see 'mid yonder glimmering spheres
Another world:—not that our prayers record,
Wherein our God shall wipe away all tears,
And never voice of mourning shall be heard;
But one between the sunset and moonrise:
Near night, yet neighbouring day: a twilit land,
And peopled by a melancholy band—
The souls that loved and fail'd—with hopeless eyes;

More like that Hades of the antique creeds;—
A land of vales forlorn, where Thought shall roam
Regretful, void of wholesome human deeds,
An endless, homeless, pining after home,

To which all sights and sounds shall minister
In vain :—white roses glimmering all alone
In an evening light: and, with his haunting tone,
The advancing twilight's shard-born trumpeter.

A world like this world's worst come back again ;
Still groaning 'neath the burthen of a Fall:
Eternal longing with eternal pain,
Want without hope, and memory saddening all.
All congregated failure and despair
Shall wander there, thro' some old maze of wrong :—
Ophelia drowning in her own death-song,
And First-Love strangled in his golden hair.

Ah well, for those that overcome, no doubt
The crowns are ready; strength is to the strong.
But we—but we—weak hearts that grope about
In darkness, with a lamp that fails along
The lengthening midnight, dying ere we reach
The bridal doors ! Oh, what for us remains,
But mortal effort with immortal pains ?
And yet—God breath'd a spirit into each !

I know this miracle of the soul is more
Than all the marvels that it looks upon.
And we are kings whose heritage was before
The spheres, and owes no homage to the sun.
In my own breast a mightier world I bear
Than all those orbs on orbs about me roll'd ;
Nor are you kinglier, stars, tho' throned on gold,
And given the empires of the midnight-air.

For I, too, am undying as you are.
O teach me calm, and teach me self-control :—
To sphere my spirit like yon fixéd star
That moves not ever in the utmost pole,
But whirls, and sleeps, and turns all heaven one way.
So, strong as Atlas, should the spirit stand,

And turn the great globe round in her right hand,
For recreation of her sovereign sway.

Ah yet!—For all, I shall not use my power,
Nor reign within the light of my own home,
Till speculation fades, and that strange hour
Of the departing of the soul is come;
Till all this wrinkled husk of care falls by,
And my immortal nature stands upright
In her perpetual morning, and the light
Of suns that set not on Eternity!

BOOK I.

IN ITALY.

THE MAGIC LAND.

By woodland belt, by ocean bar,
The full south breeze our foreheads fann'd,
And, under many a yellow star,
We dropp'd into the Magic Land.

There, every sound and every sight
Means more than sight or sound elsewhere;
Each twilight star a two-fold light;
Each rose a double redness, there.

By ocean bar, by woodland belt,
Our silent course a syren led,
Till dark in dawn began to melt,
Through the wild wizard-work o'erhead.

A murmur from the violet vales!
A glory in the goblin dell!
There, Beauty all her breast unveils,
And Music pours out all her shell.

We watch'd, toward the land of dreams,
The fair moon draw the murmuring main;
A single thread of silver beams
Was made the monster's rippling chain.

We heard far off the syren's song ;
  We caught the gleam of sea-maid's hair.
The glimmering isles and rocks among,
  We moved through sparkling purple air.

Then Morning rose, and smote from far,
  Her elfin harps o'er land and sea ;
And woodland belt, and ocean bar,
  To one sweet note, sigh'd "Italy!"

DESIRE.

The golden Planet of the Occident
  Warm from his bath comes up, i' the rosy air,
And you may tell which way the Daylight went,
  Only by his last footsteps shining there :
For now he dwells
  Sea-deep o' the other shore of the world,
And winds himself in the pink-mouthéd shells ;
Or, with his dusky, sun-dyed Priest,
Walks in the gardens of the gorgeous East ;
  Or hides in Indian hills ; or saileth where
    Floats, curiously curl'd,
Leagues out of sight and scent of spicy trees,
The cream-white nautilus on sapphrine seas.

But here the Night from the hill-top yonder
  Steals all alone, nor yet too soon ;
I have sighed for, and sought for, her ; sadder and fonder
  (All thro' the lonely and lingering noon)
Than a maiden that sits by the lattice to ponder
  On vows made in vain, long since, under the moon.
Her dusky hair she hath shaken free,
  And her tender eyes are wild with love ;

And her balmy bosom lies bare to me.
  She hath lighted the seven sweet Pleiads above;
She is breathing over the dreaming sea,
  She is murmuring low in the cedar grove;
She hath put to sleep the moaning dove
  In the silent cypress tree.

And there is no voice nor whisper,—
No voice nor whisper,
  In the hill-side olives all at rest,
Underneath blue-lighted Hesper,
  Sinking, slowly, in the liquid west:
For the night's heart knoweth best
Love by silence most exprest.
The nightingales keep mute
Each one his fairy flute,
Where the mute stars look down,
And the laurels close the green sea-side:
Only one amorous lute
Twangs in the distant town,
From some lattice open'd wide:
The climbing rose and vine are here, are there,
On the terrace, around, above me:
The lone Ledæan * lights from yon enchanted air
Look down upon my spirit, like a spirit's eyes that
    love me.

How beautiful, at night, to muse on the mountain
    height,
  Moated in purple air, and all alone!
How beautiful, at night, to look into the light
  Of loving eyes, when loving lips lean down unto
    our own!
But there is no hand in mine, no hand in mine,
  Nor any tender cheek against me prest:

* "How oft, unwearied, have we spent the nights,
Till the Ledæan stars, so famed for love,
Wonder'd at us from above."—COWLEY.

O stars that o'er me shine, I pine, I pine, I pine,
With hopeless fancies hidden in an ever-hungering breast!

O where, O where is she that should be here,
The spirit my spirit dreameth?
With the passionate eyes, so deep, so dear,
Where a secret sweetness beameth?
O sleepeth she, with her soft gold hair
Streaming over the fragrant pillow,
And a rich dream glowing in her ripe cheek,
Far away, I know not where,
By lonely shores, where the tumbling billow
Sounds all night in an emerald creek?

Or doth she lean o'er the casement stone
When the day's dull noise is done with,
And the sceptred spirit remounts alone
Into her long-usurpéd throne,
By the stairs the stars are won with?
Hearing the white owl call
Where the river draws thro' the meadows below,
By the beeches brown, and the broken wall,
His silvery, seaward waters, slow
To the ocean bounding all:
With, here a star on his glowing breast,
And, there a lamp down-streaming,
And a musical motion towards the west
Where the long white cliffs are gleaming;
While, far in the moonlight, lies at rest
A great ship, asleep and dreaming?

Or doth she linger yet
Among her sisters and brothers,
In the chamber where happy faces are met,
Distinct from all the others?
As my star up there, be it never so bright,
No other star resembles.
Doth she steal to the window, and strain her sight

(While the pearl in her warm hair trembles)
Over the dark the distant night,
Feeling something changed in her home yet;
That old songs have lost their old delight,
And the true soul is not come yet?
Till the nearest star in sight
Is drown'd in a tearful light.

I would that I were nigh her,
Wherever she rest or rove!
My spirit waves as a spiral fire
In a viewless wind doth move.
Go forth, alone, go forth, wild-wing'd Desire,
Thou art the bird of Jove,
That broodest lone by the Olympian throne;
And strong to bear the thunders which destroy,
Or fetch the ravisht, flute-playing Phrygian boy;
Go forth, across the world, and find my love!

FATALITY.

I HAVE seen her, with her golden hair,
And her exquisite primrose face,
And the violet in her eyes;
And my heart received its own despair—
The thrall of a hopeless grace,
And the knowledge of how youth dies.

Live hair afloat with snakes of gold,
And a throat as white as snow,
And a stately figure and foot;
And that faint pink smile, so sweet, so cold,
Like a wood anemone, closed below
The shade of an ilex root.

And her delicate milk-white hand in mine,
And her pensive voice in my ear,

And her eyes downcast as we speak.
I am filled with a rapture, vague and fine;
For there has fallen a sparkling tear
Over her soft, pale cheek.

And I know that all is hopeless now.
And that which might have been,
Had she only waited a year or two,
Is turn'd to a wild regret, I know,
Which will haunt us both, whatever the scene,
And whatever the path we go.

Meanwhile, for one moment, hand in hand,
We gaze on each other's eyes;
And the red moon rises above us;
We linger with love in the lovely land,—
Italy with its yearning skies,
And its wild white stars that love us.

A VISION.

THE hour of Hesperus! the hour when feeling
Grows likest memory, and the full heart swells
With pensive pleasure to the mellow pealing
Of mournful music upon distant bells:
The hour when it seems sweetest to be loved,
And saddest to have loved in days no more.
O love, O life, O lovely land of yore,
Thro' which, erewhile, these weary footsteps roved,

Was it a vision? Or Irene, sitting
Lone in her chamber, on her snowy bed,
With listless fingers, lingeringly unknitting
Her silken bodice; and, with bended head,
Hiding in warm hair, half-way to her knee,
Her pearl-pale shoulder, leaning on one arm,

Athwart the darkness, odorous and warm,
To watch the low, full moon set, pensively?

A fragrant lamp burn'd dimly in the room,
With scarce a gleam in either looking-glass.
The mellow moonlight, thro' the deep-blue gloom,
Did all along the dreamy chamber pass,
As tho' it were a little toucht with awe
(Being new-come into that quiet place
In such a quiet way) at the strange grace
Of that pale lady, and what else it saw;—

Rare flowers: narcissi; irises, each crown'd;
Red oleander blossoms; hyacinths
Flooding faint fragrance, richly curl'd all round,
Corinthian, cool columnar flowers on plinths;
Waxen Camelias, white and crimson ones;
And amber lilies, and the regal rose,
Which for the breast of queens full-scornful grows;
All pinnacled in urns of carven bronze:

Tables of inwrought stone, true Florentine,—
Olympian circles throng'd with Mercuries,
Minervas, little Junos dug i' the green
Of ruin'd Rome; and Juno's own rich eyes
Vivid on peacock plumes Sidonian:
A ribbon'd lute, young Music's cradle: books,
Vellum'd and claspt: and with bewilder'd looks,
Madonna's picture,—the old smile grown wan.

From bloomed thickets, firefly-lamp'd, beneath
The terrace, fluted cool the nightingale.
In at the open window came the breath
Of many a balmy, dim blue, dreaming vale.
At intervals the howlet's note came clear,
Fluttering dark silence thro' the cypress grove.
An infant breeze from the elf-land of Love,
Lured by the dewy hour, crept, lisping, near.

And now is all the night her own, to make it
Or grave or gay with throngs of waking dreams.
Now grows her heart so ripe, a sigh might shake it
To showers of fruit, all golden as beseems
Hesperian growth. Why not, on nights like this,
Should Daphne out from yon green laurel slip?
A Dryad from the ilex, with white hip
Quiver'd and thong'd to hunt with Artemis?

To night, what wonder were it, while such shadows
Are taking up such shapes on moonlit mountains,
Such star-flies kindling o'er low emerald meadows,
Such voices floating out of hill-side fountains,
If some full face should from the window greet her,
Whose eyes should be new planetary lights,
Whose voice a well of liquid love-delights,
And to the distance sighingly entreat her?

EROS.

What wonder that I loved her thus, that night?
The Immortals know each other at first sight,
And Love is of them.
In the fading light
Of that delicious eve, whose stars even yet
Gild the long dreamless nights, and cannot set,
She passed me, thro' the silence: all her hair,
Her waving, warm, bright hair neglectfully
Pour'd round her snowy throat, as without care
Of its own beauty.
And when she turn'd on me
The sorrowing light of desolate eyes divine,
I knew in a moment what our lives must be
Henceforth. It lighten'd on me then and there.

How she was irretrievably all mine,
I hers,—thro' time, become eternity.
It could not ever have been otherwise,
Gazing into those eyes.

And if, before I gazed on them, my soul,
Oblivious of her destiny, had follow'd,
In days forever silent, the control
Of any beauty less divinely hallow'd
Than that upon her beautiful white brows,
(The serene summits of all earthly sweetness!)
Straightway the records of all other vows
Of idol-worship faded silently
Out of the folding leaves of memory,
Forever and forever; and my heart became
Pure white at once, to keep in its completeness,
And perfect purity,
Her mystic name.

INDIAN LOVE SONG.

My body sleeps: my heart awakes.
  My lips to breathe thy name are moved
In slumber's ear: then slumber breaks;
  And I am drawn to thee, beloved.
Thou drawest me, thou drawest me,
  Thro' sleep, thro' night. I hear the rills,
  And hear the leopard in the hills,
And down the dark I feel to thee.

The vineyards and the villages
  Were silent in the vales, the rocks.
I followed past the myrrhy trees,
  And by the footsteps of the flocks.
Wild honey, dropt from stone to stone,
  Where bees have been, my path suggests.

The winds are in the eagles' nests.
The moon is hid. I walk alone.

Thou drawest me, thou drawest me
Across the glimmering wildernesses,
And drawest me, my love, to thee,
With dove's eyes hidden in thy tresses.
The world is many: my love is one.
I find no likeness for my love.
The cinnamons grow in the grove:
The Golden Tree grows all alone.

O who hath seen her wondrous hair?
Or seen my dove's eyes in the woods?
Or found her voice upon the air?
Her steps along the solitudes?
Or where is beauty like to hers?
She draweth me, she draweth me.
I sought her by the incense-tree,
And in the aloes, and in the firs.

Where art thou, O my heart's delight,
With dove's eyes hidden in thy locks?
My hair is wet with dews of night.
My feet are torn upon the rocks.
The cedarn scents, the spices, fail
About me. Strange and stranger seems
The path. There comes a sound of streams
Above the darkness on the vale.

No trees drop gums; but poison flowers
From rifts and clefts all round me fall.
The perfumes of thy midnight bowers,
The fragrance of thy chambers, all
Is drawing me, is drawing me.
Thy baths prepare; anoint thine hair:
Open the window: meet me there:
I come to thee, to thee, to thee!

Thy lattices are dark, my own.
Thy doors are still. My love look out.
Arise, my dove with tender tone.
The camphor-clusters all about
Are whitening. Dawn breaks silently.
And all my spirit, with the dawn
Expands; and, slowly slowly drawn,
Thro' mist and darkness moves toward thee.

MORNING AND MEETING.

One yellow star, the largest and the last
Of all the lovely night, was fading slow
(As fades a happy moment in the past)
Out of the changing east, when, yet aglow
With dreams her looks made magical, from sleep
I waked; and oped the lattice. Like a rose
All the red-opening morning 'gan disclose
A ripen'd light upon the distant steep.

A bell was chiming thro' the crystal air
From the high convent-church upon the hill.
The folk were loitering by to matin prayer.
The church-bell call'd me out, and seem'd to fill
The air with little hopes. I reach'd the door
Before the chaunted hymn began to rise,
And float its liquid latin melodies
O'er pious groups about the marble floor.

Breathless, I slid among the kneeling folk.
A little bell went tinkling thro' the pause
Of inward prayer. Then forth the low chaunt broke
Among the glooming aisles, that thro' a gauze
Of sunlight glimmer'd.

Thickly throbb'd my blood.
I saw, dark-tresséd in the rose-lit shade,
Many a little dusk Italian maid,
Kneeling with fervent face close where I stood.

The morning, all a misty splendour, shook
Deep in the mighty window's flame-lit webs.
It touch'd the crown'd Apostle with his hook,
And brighten'd where the sea of jasper ebbs
About those Saints' white feet that stand serene
Each with his legend, each in his own hue
Attir'd: some beryl-golden: sapphire-blue
Some: and some ruby-red: some emerald-green.

Wherefrom, in rainbow-wreathes, the rich light roll'd
About the snowy altar, sparkling clean.
The organ groan'd and pined, then, growing bold,
Revell'd the cherubs' golden wings atween.
And in the light, beneath the music, kneel'd
(As pale as some stone Virgin bending solemn
Out of the red gleam of a granite column)
Irene with claspt hands and cold lips seal'd.

As one who, pausing on some mountain-height,
Above the breeze that breaks o'er vineyard walls,
Leans to the impulse of a wild delight,
Bows earthward, feels the hills bow too, and falls—
I dropt beside her. Feeling seem'd to expand
And close: a mist of music fill'd the air:
And, when it ceased in heaven, I was aware
That, thro' a rapture, I had toucht her hand.

THE CLOUD.

With shape to shape, all day,
And change to change, by foreland, firth, and bay,
The cloud comes down from wandering with the wind,
Thro' gloom and gleam across the green waste seas;
And, leaving the white cliff and lone tower bare
To empty air,
Slips down the windless west, and grows defined
In splendour by degrees.

And, blown by every wind
Of wonder thro' all regions of the mind,
From hope to fear, from doubt to sweet despite,
Changing all shapes, and mingling snow with fire,
The thought of her descends, sleeps o'er the bounds
Of passion, grows, and rounds
Its golden outlines in a gradual light
Of still desire.

ROOT AND LEAF.

The love that deep within me lies
Unmoved abides in conscious power;
Yet in the heaven of thy sweet eyes
It varies every hour.

A look from thee will flush the cheek:
A word of thine awaken tears:
And, ah, in all I do and speak
How frail my love appears!

In yonder tree, Belov'd, whose boughs
Are household both to earth and heaven,
Whose leaves have murmur'd of our vows
To many a balmy even,

The branch that wears the liveliest green,
Is shaken by the restless bird ;
The leaves that nighest heaven are seen,
By every breeze are stirr'd:

But storms may rise, and thunders roll,
Nor move the giant roots below ;
So, from the bases of the soul,
My love for thee doth grow.

It seeks the heaven, and trembles there
To every light and passing breath ;
But from the heart no storm can tear
Its rooted growth beneath.

WARNINGS.

BEWARE, beware of witchery !
And fall not in the snare
That lurks and lies in wanton eyes,
Or hides in golden hair :
For the Witch hath sworn to catch thee,
And her spells are on the air.
" Thou art fair, fair, fatal fair,
O Irene !

What is it, what is it,
In the whispers of the leaves ?
In the night wind, when its bosom,
With the shower in it, grieves ?

In the breaking of the breaker,
As it breaks upon the beach
Thro' the silence of the night ?
Cordelia ! Cordelia !
A warning in my ear—
" Not here ! not here ! not here !
But seek her yet, and seek her,
Seek her ever out of reach,
Out of reach, and out of sight ! "
Cordelia !
Eyes on mine, when none can view me !
And a magic murmur thro' me !
And a presence out of Fairyland,
Invisible, yet near !
Cordelia !
" In a time which hath not been :
In a land thou hast not seen :
Thou shalt find her, but not now :
Thou shalt meet her, but not here : "
Cordelia ! Cordelia !
" In the falling of the snow :
In the fading of the year :
When the light of hope is low,
And the last red leaf is sere."
Cordelia !

And my senses lie asleep, fast asleep,
O Irene !
In the chambers of this Sorceress, the South.
In a slumber dim and deep,
She is seeking yet to keep,
Brimful of poison'd perfumes,
The shut blossom of my youth.
O fatal, fatal fair Irene !

But the whispering of the leaves,
And the night wind, when it grieves
And the breaking of the breaker,
As it breaks upon the beach

Thro' the silence of the night,
Cordelia!
Whisper ever in my ear
"Not here! not here! not here!
But awake, O wanderer! seek her
Ever seek her out of reach,
Out of reach, and out of sight!"
Cordelia!

There is a star above me
Unlike all the millions round it.
There is a heart to love me.
Altho' not yet I have found it.
And awhile,
O Cordelia, Cordelia!
A light and careless singer,
In the subtle South I linger,
While the blue is on the mountain,
And the bloom is on the peach,
And the fire-fly on the night,
Cordelia!
But my course is ever norward,
And a whisper whispers "Forward!"
Arise, O wanderer, seek her,
Seek her ever out of reach,
Out of reach and out of sight!
Cordelia!
Out of sight,
Cordelia! Cordelia!
Out of reach, out of sight,
Cordelia!

A FANCY.

How sweet were life,—*this* life, if we
(My love and I) might dwell together
Here beyond the summer sea,
In the heart of summer weather!

With pomegranates on the bough,
And with lilies in the bower;
And a sight of distant snow,
Rosy in the sunset hour.

And a little house,—no more
In state than suits two quiet lovers;
And a woodbine round the door,
Where the swallow builds and hovers

With a silver sickle-moon,
O'er hot gardens, red with roses:
And a window wide, in June,
For serenades when evening closes:

In a chamber cool and simple,
Trellised light from roof to basement;
And a summer wind to dimple
The white curtain at the casement:

Where, if we at midnight wake,
A green acacia-tree shall quiver
In the moonlight, o'er some lake
Where nightingales sing songs forever.

With a pine-wood dark in sight;
And a bean-field climbing to us,
To make odours faint at night
Where we roam with none to view us.

And a convent on the hill,
  Through its light green olives peeping
In clear sunlight, and so still,
  All the nuns, you'd say, were sleeping.

Seas at distance, seen beneath
  Grated garden-wildernesses;—
Not so far but what their breath
  At eve may fan my darling's tresses.

A piano, soft in sound,
  To make music when speech wanders,
Poets reverently bound,
  O'er whose pages rapture ponders.

Canvas, brushes, hues, to catch
  Fleeting forms in vale or mountain:
And an evening star to watch
  When all's still, save one sweet fountain.

Ah! I idle time away
  With impossible fond fancies!
For a lover lives all day
  In a land of lone romances.

But the hot light o'er the city
  Drops—and see! on fire departs.
And the night comes down in pity
  To the longing of our hearts.

Bind thy golden hair from falling,
  O my love, my one, my own!
'Tis for thee the cuckoo's calling
  With a note of tenderer tone.

Up the hill-side, near and nearer,
  Through the vine, the corn, the flowers,
Till the very air grows dearer,
  Neighbouring our pleasant bowers.

Now I pass the last Poderè:
  There, the city lies behind me.
See her fluttering like a fairy
  O'er the happy grass to find me!

ONCE.

A FALLING star that shot across
  The intricate and twinkling dark
Vanisht, yet left no sense of loss
  Throughout the wide ethereal arc

Of those serene and solemn skies
  That round the dusky prospect rose,
And ever seem'd to rise, and rise,
  Through regions of unreach'd repose.

Far, on the windless mountain-range,
  One crimson sparklet died: the blue
Flush'd with a brilliance, faint and strange,
  The ghost of daylight, dying too.

But half-reveal'd, each terrace urn
  Glimmer'd, where now, in filmy flight,
We watch'd return, and still return,
  The blind bats searching air for sight.

With sullen fits of fleeting sound,
  Borne half asleep on slumbrous air,
The drowsy beetle humm'd around,
  And pass'd, and oft repass'd us, there;

Where, hand in hand, our looks alight
  With thoughts our pale lips left untold,
We sat, in that delicious night,
  On that dim terrace, green and old.

Deep down, far off, the city lay,
  When forth from all its spires was swept
A music o'er our souls; and they
  To music's midmost meanings leapt;

And, crushing some delirious cry
  Against each other's lips, we clung
Together silent, while the sky
  Throbbing with sound around us hung:

For, borne from bells on music soft,
  That solemn hour went forth thro' heaven,
To stir the starry airs aloft,
  And thrill the purple pulse of even.

O happy hush of heart to heart!
  O moment molten thro' with bliss!
O Love, delaying long to part
  That first, fast, individual kiss!

Whereon two lives on glowing lips
  Hung claspt, each feeling fold in fold,
Like daisies closed with crimson tips,
  That sleep about a heart of gold.

Was it some drowsy rose that moved?
  Some dreaming dove's pathetic moan?
Or was it my name from lips beloved?
  And was it thy sweet breath, mine own,

That made me feel the tides of sense
  O'er life's low levels rise with might,
And pour my being down the immense
  Shore of some mystic Infinite?

"Oh, have I found thee, my soul's soul?
  My chosen forth from time and space!
And did we then break earth's control?
  And have I seen thee face to face?

"Close, closer to thy home, my breast,
Closer thy darling arms enfold!
I need such warmth, for else the rest
Of life will freeze me dead with cold.

"Long was the search, the effort long,
Ere I compell'd thee from thy sphere,
I know not with what mystic song,
I know not with what nightly tear:

"But thou art here, beneath whose eyes
My passion falters, even as some
Pale wizard's taper sinks, and dies,
When to his spell a spirit is come.

"My brow is pale with much of pain:
Though I am young, my youth is gone:
And, shouldst thou leave me lone again,
I think I could not live alone.

"As some idea, half divined,
With tumult works within the brain
Of desolate genius, and the mind
Is vassal to imperious pain,

"For toil by day, for tears by night,
Till, in the sphere of vision brought,
Rises the beautiful and bright
Predestined, but relentless Thought;

"So, gathering up the dreams of years,
Thy love doth to its destined seat
Rise sovran, thro' the light of tears—
Achieved, accomplisht, and complete!

"I fear not now lest any hour
Should chill the lips my own have prest;
For I possess thee by the power
Whereby I am myself possest.

"These eyes must lose their guiding light:
These lips from thine, I know, must sever:
Oh looks and lips may disunite,
But ever love is love forever!"

SINCE.

Words like to those were said, or dream'd
(How long since!) on a night divine,
By lips from which such rapture stream'd
I cannot deem those lips were mine.

The day comes up above the roofs,
All sallow from a night of rain;
The sound of feet, and wheels, and hoofs
In the blurr'd street begins again:

The same old toil—no end—no aim!
The same vile babble in my ears;
The same unmeaning smiles: the same
Most miserable dearth of tears.

The same dull sound: the same dull lack
Of lustre in the level gray:
It seems like Yesterday come back
With his old things, and not To-day.

But now and then her name will fall
From careless lips with little praise,
On this dry shell, and shatter all
The smooth indifference of my days.

They chatter of her—deem her light—
The apes and liars! they who know
As well to sound the unfathom'd Night
As her impenetrable woe!

And here, where Slander's scorn is spilt,
And gabbling Folly clucks above
Her addled eggs, it feels like guilt,
To know that far away, my love

Her heart on every heartless hour
Is bruising, breaking, for my sake:
While, coil'd and numb'd, and void of power,
My life sleeps like a winter snake.

I know that at the mid of night,
(When she flings by the glittering stress
Of Pride, that mocks the vulgar sight,
And fronts her chamber's loneliness,)

She breaks in tears, and, overthrown
With sorrowing, weeps the night away,
Till back to his unlovely throne
Returns the unrelenting day.

All treachery could devise hath wrought
Against us:—letters robb'd and read:
Snares hid in smiles: betrayal bought:
And lies imputed to the dead.

I will arise, and go to her,
And save her in her own despite;
For in my breast begins to stir
A pulse of its old power and might.

They cannot so have slander'd me
But what, I know, if I should call
And stretch my arms to her, that she
Would rush into them, spite of all.

In Life's great lazar-house, each breath
We breathe may bring or spread the pest;
And, woman, each may catch his death
From those that lean upon his breast.

I know how tender friends of me
Have talk'd with broken hint, and glance:
—The choicest flowers of calumny,
That seem, like weeds, to spring from chance;—

That small, small, imperceptible
Small talk, which cuts like powder'd glass
Ground in Tophana—none can tell
Where lurks the power the poison has!

I may be worse than they would prove,
(Who knows the worst of any man?)
But, right or wrong, be sure my love
Is not what they conceive, or can.

Nor do I question what thou art,
Nor what thy life, in great or small,
Thou art, I know, what all my heart
Must beat or break for. That is all.

A LOVE LETTER.

My love,—my chosen,—but not mine! I send
My whole heart to thee in these words I write;
So let the blotted lines, my soul's sole friend,
Lie upon thine, and there be blest at night.

This flower, whose bruiséd purple blood will stain
The page now wet with the hot tears that fall—
(Indeed, indeed, I struggle to restrain
This weakness, but the tears come, spite of all!)

I pluck'd it from the branch you used to praise,
The branch that hides the wall. I tend your flowers.
I keep the paths we paced in happier days.
How long ago they seem, those pleasant hours!

The white laburnum's out. Your judas-tree
Begins to shed those crimson buds of his.
The nightingales sing—ah, too joyously!
Who says those birds are sad? I think there is

That in the books we read, which deeper wrings
My heart, so they lie dusty on the shelf.
Ah me, I meant to speak of other things
Less sad. In vain! they bring me to myself.

I know your patience. And I would not cast
New shade on days so dark as yours are grown
By weak and wild repining for the past,
Since it is past forever, O mine own!

For hard enough the daily cross you bear,
Without that deeper pain reflection brings;
And all too sore the fretful household care,
Free of the contrast of remember'd things.

But ah! it little profits, that we thrust
From all that's said, what both must feel, unnamed.
Better to face it boldly, as we must,
Than feel it in the silence, and be shamed.

Irene, I have loved you, as men love
Light, music, odour, beauty, love itself;—
Whatever is apart from, and above
Those daily needs which deal with dust and pelf.

And I had been content, without one thought
Our guardian angels could have blusht to know,
So to have lived and died, demanding nought
Save, living dying, to have loved you so.

My youth was orphan'd, and my age will be
Childless. I have no sister. None, to steal
One stray thought from the many thoughts of thee,
Which are the source of all I think and feel.

My wildest wish was vassal to thy will:
My haughtiest hope, a pensioner on thy smile,
Which did with light my barren being fill,
As moonlight glorifies some desert isle.

I never thought to know what I have known,—
The rapture, dear, of being loved by you:
I never thought, within my heart, to own
One wish so blest that you should share it too:

Nor ever did I deem, contemplating
The many sorrows in this place of pain,
So strange a sorrow to my life could cling,
As, being thus loved, to be beloved in vain.

But now we know the best, the worst. We have
Interr'd, and prematurely, and unknown,
Our youth, our hearts, our hopes, in one small grave,
Whence we must wander, widow'd, to our own.

And if we comfort not each other, what
Shall comfort us, in the dark days to come?
Not the light laughter of the world, and not
The faces and the firelight of fond home.

And so I write to you; and write, and write,
For the mere sake of writing to you, dear.
What can I tell you, that you know not? Night
Is deepening thro' the rosy atmosphere

About the lonely casement of this room,
Which you have left familiar with the grace
That grows where you have been. And on the gloom
I almost fancy I can see your face.

Not pale with pain, and tears restrain'd for me,
As when I last beheld it; but as first,

A dream of rapture and of poesy,
Upon my youth, like dawn on dark, it burst.

Perchance I shall not ever see again
That face. I know that I shall never see
Its radiant beauty as I saw it then,
Save by this lonely lamp of memory,

With childhood's starry graces lingering yet
'I the rosy orient of young womanhood;
And eyes like woodland violets newly wet;
And lips that left their meaning in my blood!

I will not say to you what I might say
To one less worthily loved, less worthy love.
I will not say . . . "Forget the past. Be gay.
And let the all ill-judging world approve

Light in your eyes, and laughter on your lip."
I will not say . . . "Dissolve in thought forever
Our sorrowful, but sacred, fellowship."
For that would be, to bid you, dear, dissever

Your nature from its nobler heritage
In consolations register'd in heaven,
For griefs this world is barren to assuage,
And hopes to which, on earth, no home is given.

But I would whisper, what for evermore
My own heart whispers thro' the wakeful night, . . .
"This grief is but a shadow, flung before,
From some refulgent substance out of sight."

Wherefore it happens, in this riddling world,
That, where sin came not, sorrow yet should be;
Why heaven's most hurtful thunders should be hurl'd
At what seems noblest in humanity;

And we are punish'd for our purest deeds,
And chasten'd for our holiest thoughts; . . . alas!
There is no reason found in all the creeds,
Why these things are, nor whence they come to pass.

But in the heart of man, a secret voice
There is, which speaks, and will not be restrain'd,
Which cries to Grief . . "weep on, while I rejoice,
Knowing that, somewhere, all will be explain'd."

I will not cant that commonplace of friends,
Which never yet hath dried one mourner's tears,
Nor say that grief's slow wisdom makes amends
For broken hearts and desolated years.

For who would barter all he hopes from life,
To be a little wiser than his kind?
Who arm his nature for continued strife,
Where all he seeks for hath been left behind?

But I would say, O pure and perfect pearl
Which I have dived so deep in life to find,
Lock'd in my heart thou liest. The wave may curl,
The wind may wail above us. Wave and wind,

What are their storm and strife to me and you?
No strife can mar the pure heart's inmost calm.
This life of ours, what is it? A very few
Soon-ended years, and then,—the ceaseless psalm,

And the eternal sabbath of the soul!
Hush! . . . while I write, from the dim Carminé
The midnight angelus begins to roll,
And float athwart the darkness up to me.

My messenger (a man by danger tried)
Waits in the courts below; and ere our star

Upon the forehead of the dawn hath died,
Belovéd one, this letter will be far

Athwart the mountain, and the mist, to you.
I know each robber hamlet. I know all
This mountain people. I have friends, both true
And trusted, sworn to aid whate'er befall.

I have a bark upon the gulf. And I,
If to my heart I yielded in this hour,
Might say . . . " Sweet fellow-sufferer, let us fly !
I know a little isle which doth embower

A home where exiled angels might forbear
A while to mourn for Paradise." . . . But no !
Never, whate'er fate now may bring us, dear,
Shalt thou reproach me for that only woe

Which even love is powerless to console ;
Which dwells where duty dies: and haunts the tomb
Of life's abandon'd purpose in the soul ;
And leaves to hope, in heaven itself, no room.

Man cannot make, but may ennoble, fate,
By nobly bearing it. So let us trust
Not to ourselves but God, and calmly wait
Love's orient, out of darkness and of dust.

Farewell, and yet again farewell, and yet
Never farewell,—if farewell mean to fare
Alone and disunited. Love hath set
Our days, in music, to the selfsame air ;

And I shall feel, wherever we may be,
Even tho' in absence and an alien clime,
The shadow of the sunniness of thee,
Hovering, in patience, through a clouded time.

Farewell! The dawn is rising, and the light
Is making, in the east, a faint endeavour
To illuminate the mountain peaks. Good night.
Thine own, and only thine, my love, forever.

CONDEMNED ONES.

Above thy child I saw thee bend,
Where in that silent room we sat apart.
I watch'd the involuntary tear descend;
The fire-light was not all so dim, my friend,
But I could read thy heart.

Yet when, in that familiar room,
I strove, so moveless in my place,
To look with comfort in thy face,
That child's young smile was all that I could see
Ever between us in the thoughtful gloom,—
Ever between thyself and me,—
With its bewildering grace.

Life is not what it might have been,
Nor are we what we would!
And we must meet with smiling mien,
And part in careless mood,
Knowing that each retains unseen,
In cells of sense subdued,
A little lurking secret of the blood—
A little serpent-secret rankling keen—
That makes the heart its food.

Yet is there much for grateful tears, if sad ones!
And Hope's young orphans Memory mothers yet;
So let them go, the sunny days we had once,
Our night hath stars that will not ever set.
And in our hearts are harps, albeit not glad ones,

Yet not all unmelodious, thro' whose strings
The night-winds murmur their familiar things,
Unto a kindred sadness: the sea brings
The spirits of its solitude, with wings
Folden about the music of each lyre,
Thrill'd with deep duals by sublime desire,
Which never can attain, yet ever must aspire,
And glorify regret.

What might have been, I know, is not:
What must be, must be borne:
But, ah! what hath been will not be forgot,
Never, oh! never, in the years to follow!
Tho' all their summers light a waste forlorn,
Yet shall there be (hid from the careless swallow
And shelter'd from the bleak wind in the thorn)
In Memory's mournful, but belovéd hollow,
One dear green spot!

Hope, the high will of Heaven
To help us hath not given,
But more than unto most of consolation:
Since heart from heart may borrow
Healing for deep heart-sorrow,
And draw from yesterday, to soothe to-morrow,
The sad, sweet divination
Of that unutter'd sympathy, which is
Love's sorceress, and for Love's dear sake,
About us both such spells doth make,
As none can see, and none can break,
And none restrain;—a secret pain
Claspt to a secret bliss!

A tone, a touch,
A little look, may be so much!
Those moments brief, nor often,
When, leaning laden breast to breast,
Pale cheek to cheek, life, long represt,
May gush with tears that leave half blest

The want of bliss they soften.
The little glance across the crowd,
None else can read, wherein there lies
A life of love at once avow'd—
The embrace of pining eyes. . . .
So little more had made earth heaven,
That hope to help us was not given!

THE STORM.

Both hollow and hill were as dumb as death,
While the skies were silently changing form;
And the dread forecast of the thunder-storm
Made the crouch'd land hold in its breath.

But the monstrous vapour as yet was unriven
That was breeding the thunder and lightning and rain;
And the wind that was waiting to ruin the plain
Was yet fast in some far hold of heaven.

So, in absolute absence of stir or strife,
The red land lay as still as a drifted leaf:
The roar of the thunder had been a relief,
To the calm of that death-brooding life.

At the wide-flung casement she stood full height,
With her long rolling hair tumbled all down her back;
And, against the black sky's supernatural black,
Her white neck gleam'd scornfully white.

I could catch not a gleam of her anger'd eyes,
(She was sullenly watching the slow storm roll,)
But I felt they were drawing down into her soul
The thunder that darken'd the skies.

And how could I feign, in that heartless gloom,
To be carelessly reading that stupid page?
What harm, if I flung it in anguish and rage,
Her book, to the end of the room?

"And so, do we part thus forever?" . . . I said;
"Oh! speak only one word, and I pardon the rest!"
She drew her white scarf tighter over her breast,
But she never once turned round her head.

"In this wicked old world is there naught to disdain?
Or"—I groaned—"are those dark eyes such deserts of blindness,
That, O Woman! your heart must hoard all its unkindness,
For the man on whose breast it hath lain?

"Leave it nameless, the grave of the grief that is past;
Be its sole sign the silence we keep for its sake.
I have loved you—lie still in my heart till it break:
As I loved, I must love to the last.

"Speak! the horrible silence is stifling my soul."
She turned on me at once all the storm in her eyes;
And I heard the low thunder aloof in the skies,
Beginning to mutter and roll.

She turn'd—by the lightning reveal'd in its glare,
And the tempest had clothed her with terror: it clung
To the folds of her vaporous garments, and hung
In the heaps of her heavy wild hair.

But one word broke the silence; but one; and it fell
With the weight of a mountain upon me. Next moment
The fierce levin flash'd in my eyes. From my comment
She was gone when I turn'd. Who can tell

How I got to my home on the mountain? I know
That the thunder was rolling, the lightning still flashing,
The great bells were tolling, my very brain crashing
In my head, a few hours ago:

Then all hush'd. In the distance the blue rain receded;
And the fragments of storm were spread out on the hills;
Hard by, from my lattice, I heard the far rills
Leaping down their rock-channels, wild-weeded.

The round, red moon was yet low in the air. . . .
Oh, I knew it, foresaw it, and felt it, before
I heard her light hand on the latch of the door!
When it open'd at last,—she was there.

Childlike, and wistful, and sorrowful-eyed,
With the rain on her hair, and the rain on her cheek;
She knelt down, with her fair forehead fallen and meek
In the light of the moon at my side.

And she call'd me by every caressing old name
She of old had invented and chosen for me:
She crouch'd at my feet, with her cheek on my knee,
Like a wild thing grown suddenly tame.

In the world there are women enough, maids or
mothers;
Yet, in multiplied millions, I never should find
The symbol of aught in her face, or her mind.
She has nothing in common with others.

And she loves me! This morning the earth, press'd
beneath
Her light foot, keeps the print. 'Twas no vision
last night,
For the lily she dropp'd, as she went, is yet
white
With the dew on its delicate sheath!

THE VAMPYRE.

I FOUND a corpse, with golden hair,
Of a maiden seven months dead.
But the face, with the death in it, still was fair,
And the lips with their love were red.
Rose leaves on a snow-drift shed,
Blood-drops by Adonis bled,
Doubtless were not so red.

I comb'd her hair into curls of gold,
And I kiss'd her lips till her lips were warm;
And I bathed her body in moonlight cold,
Till she grew to a living form:
Till she stood up bold to a magic of old,
And walk'd to a mutter'd charm—
Life-like, without alarm.

And she walks by me, and she talks by me,
Evermore, night and day;
For she loves me so, that, wherever I go,
She follows me all the way—

This corpse—you would almost say
There pined a soul in the clay.

Her eyes are so bright at the dead of night
That they keep me awake with dread;
And my life-blood fails in my veins, and pales
At the sight of her lips so red:
For her face is as white as the pillow by night
Where she kisses me on my bed:
All her gold hair outspread—
Neither alive nor dead.

I would that this woman's head
Were less golden about the hair:
I would her lips were less red,
And her face less deadly fair.
For this is the worst to bear—
How came that redness there?

'Tis my heart, be sure, she eats for her food;
And it makes one's whole flesh creep
To think that she drinks and drains my blood
Unawares, when I am asleep.
How else could those red lips keep
Their redness so damson-deep?

There's a thought like a serpent, slips
Ever into my heart and head,—
There are plenty of women, alive and human,
One might woo, if one wish'd, and wed—
Women with hearts, and brains,—ay, and lips
Not so very terribly red.

But to house with a corpse—and she so fair!
With that dim, unearthly, golden hair,
And those sad, serene, blue eyes,
With their looks from who knows where,
Which Death has made so wise,
With the grave's own secret there—
It is more than a man can bear!

It were better for me, ere I came nigh her,
This corpse—ere I look'd upon her,
Had they burn'd my body in flame and fire
With a sorcerer's dishonour.
For when the Devil hath made his lair,
And lurks in the eyes of a fair young woman,
(To grieve a man's soul with her golden hair
And break his heart, if his heart be human,)
Would not a saint despair
To be saved by fast or prayer
From perdition made so fair?

CHANGE.

She is unkind, unkind!
On the windy hill, to-day,
I sat in the sound of the wind.
I knew what the wind would say.
It said . . . or seemed to my mind . . .
"The flowers are falling away.
The summer," . . . it said, . . . "will not stay,
And Love will be left behind."

The swallows were swinging themselves
In the leaden-gray air aloft;
Flitting by tens and twelves,
And returning oft and oft;
Like the thousand thoughts in me,
That went, and came, and went,
Not letting me even be
Alone with my discontent.

The hard-vext weary vane
Rattled, and moan'd and was still,
In the convent over the plain,
By the side of the windy hill.

It was sad to hear it complain
So fretful, and weak, and shrill,
Again, and again, and in vain,
While the wind was changing his will.

I thought of our walks last summer
By the convent-walls so green;
Of the first kiss stolen from her,
With no one near to be seen.
I thought (as we wander'd on,
Each of us waiting to speak)
How the daylight left us alone,
And left his last light on her cheek.

The plain was as cold and gray
(With its villas like glimmering shells)
As some north-ocean bay.
All dumb in the church were the bells.
In the mist, half a league away,
Lay the little white house where she dwells.

I thought of her face so bright,
By the firelight bending low
O'er her work so neat and whte;
Of her singing so soft and slow;
Of her tender-toned "Good-night;"
But a very few nights ago.

O'er the convent doors, I could see
A pale and sorrowful-eyed
Madonna looking at me,
As when Our Lord first died.
There was not a lizard or spider
To be seen on the broken walls.
The ruts, with the rain, had grown wider,
And blacker since last night's falls.
O'er the universal dulness
There broke not a single beam.
I thought how my love at its fulness
Had changed like a change in a dream.

The olives were shedding fast
About me to left and right,
In the lap of the scornful blast
Black berries and leaflets white.
I thought of the many romances
One wintry word can blight;
Of the tender and timorous fancies
By a cold look put to flight.

How many noble deeds
Strangled perchance at their birth!
The smoke of the burning weeds
Came up with the steam of the earth,
From the red, wet ledges of soil,
And the sere vines, row over row,—
And the vineyard-men at their toil,
Who sang in the vineyard below.

Last Spring, while I thought of her here,
I found a red rose on the hill.
There it lies, wither'd and sere!
Let him trust to a woman who will.

I thought how her words had grown colder,
And her fair face colder still,
From the hour whose silence had told her
What has left me heart-broken and ill;
And "Oh!" I thought, . . . "if I behold her
Walking there with him under the hill!"

O'er the mist, from the mournful city
The blear lamps gleam'd aghast,—
—"She has neither justice, nor pity,"
I thought, . . . "all's over at last!"
The cold eve came. One star
Thro' a ragged gray gap forlorn
Fell down from some region afar,
And sicken'd as soon as born.
I thought, "How long and how lone

The years will seem to be,
When the last of her looks is gone,
And my heart is silent in me!

One streak of scornful gold,
In the cloudy and billowy west,
Burn'd with a light as cold
As love in a much-wrong'd breast.
I thought of her face so fair;
Of her perfect bosom and arm;
Of her deep sweet eyes and hair;
Of her breath so pure and warm;
Of her foot so fine and fairy
Thro' the meadows where she would pass;
Of the sweep of her skirts so airy
And fragrant over the grass.

I thought . . . "Can I live without her
Whatever she do, or say?"
I thought . . . "Can I dare to doubt her,
Now when I have given away
My whole self, body and spirit,
To keep, or to cast aside,
To dower or disinherit,—
To use as she may decide?"

The West was beginning to close
O'er the last light burning there.
I thought . . . "And when that goes,
The dark will be everywhere!"

Oh! well is it hidden from man
Whatever the Future may bring
The bells in the church began
On a sudden to sound and swing.
The chimes on the gust were caught,
And roll'd up the windy height.
I rose, and return'd, and thought . . .
"I SHALL NOT SEE HER TO-NIGHT."

A CHAIN TO WEAR.

Away! away! The dream was vain.
We meet too soon, or meet too late:
Still wear, as best you may, the chain
Your own hands forged about your fate,
Who could not wait!

What! . . . you had given your life away
Before you found what most life misses?
Forsworn the bridal dream, you say,
Of that ideal love, whose kisses
Are vain as this is!

Well, I have left upon your mouth
The seal I know must burn there yet;
My claim is set upon your youth;
My sign upon your soul is set;—
Dare you forget?

And you'll haunt, I know, where music plays,
Yet find a pain in music's tone;
You ll blush, of course, when others praise
That beauty scarcely now your own.
What's done, is done!

For me, you say, the world is wide,—
Too wide to find the grave I seek!
Enough! whatever now betide,
No greater pang can blanch my cheek.
Hush! . . . do not speak.

SILENCE.

Words of fire, and words of scorn,
I have written. Let them go!

Words of love—heart-broken, torn,
With this strong and sudden woe.
All my scorn, she could not doubt,
Was but love turn'd inside out.

Silence, silence, still unstirr'd;
Long, unbroken, unexplain'd:
Not one word, one little word,
Even to show her touch'd or pain'd
Silence, silence, all unbroken:
Not a sound, a sign, a token.

Well, let silence gather round
All this shatter'd life of mine.
Shall I break it by a sound?
Let it grow, and be divine—
Divine as that Prometheus kept
When for his sake the sea-nymphs wept.

Let silence settle, still and deep;
As the mist, the thunder-cloud,
O'er the lonely blasted steep,
Which the red bolt hath not bow'd,
Settle, to drench out the star,
And cancel the blue vales afar.

In this silence I will sheathe
The sharp edge and point of all!
Not a sigh my lips shall breathe;
Not a groan, what'er befall.
And let this sworded silence be
A fence 'twixt prying fools and me.

Let silence be about her name,
And o'er the things which once have been:
Let silence cover up my shame,
And annul that face, once seen
In fatal hours, and all the light
Of those eyes extinguish quite.

In silence, I go forth alone
O'er the solemn mystery
Of the deeds which, to be done,
Yet undone in the future lie.
I peer in Time's high nests, and there
Espy the callow brood of Care,

The fledgeless nurslings of Regret,
With beaks forever stretch'd for food:
But why should I forecount as yet
The ravage of that vulture brood?
O'er all these things let silence stay,
And lie, like snow, along my way.

Let silence in this outraged heart
Abide, and seal these lips forever;
Let silence dwell with me apart
Beside the ever-babbling river
Of that loud life in towns, that runs
Blind to the changes of the suns.

Ah! from what most mournful star,
Wasting down on evening's edge,
Or what barren isle afar
Flung by on some bare ocean ledge,
Came the wicked hag to us,
That changed the fairy revel thus?

There were sounds from sweet guitars
Once, and lights from lamps of amber;
Both went up among the stars
From many a perfumed palace-chamber.
Suddenly the place seem'd dead;
Light and music both were fled.

Darkness in each perfumed chamber;
Darkness, silence, in the stars;
Darkness on the lamps of amber;
Silence in the sweet guitars:

Darkness, silence, evermore
Guard empty chamber, moveless door.

NEWS.

News, news, news, my gossiping friends!
I have wonderful news to tell.
A lady, by me, her compliments sends;
And this is the news from Hell:

The Devil is dead. He died resign'd,
Tho' somewhat opprest by cares;
But his wife, my friends, is a woman of mind,
And looks after her lord's affairs.

I have just come back from that wonderful place,
And kist hands with the Queen down there;
But I cannot describe Her Majesty's face,
It has fill'd me so with despair.

The place is not what you might suppose:
It is worse in some respects.
But all that I heard there, I must not disclose,
For the lady that told me objects.

The laws of the land are not Salique,
But the King never dies, of course;
The new Queen is young, and pretty, and *chic;*
There are women, I think, that are worse.

But however that be, one thing I know,
And this I am free to tell;
The Devil, my friends, is a woman, just now;
'Tis a woman that reigns in Hell.

COUNT RINALDO RINALDI.

'Tis a dark-purple, moonlighted midnight:—
There is music about on the air.
And, where, thro' the water, fall flashing
The oars of each gay gondolier,
The lamp-lighted ripples are dashing,
In the musical moonlighted air,
To the music, in merriment; washing,
And splashing, the black marble stair
That leads to the last garden-terrace,
Where many a gay cavalier
And many a lady yet loiter,
Round the Palace in festival there.

'Tis a terrace all paven mosaic,—
Black marble, and green malachite;
Round an ancient Venetian Palace,
Where the windows with lampions are bright.
'Tis an evening of gala and festival,
Music, and passion, and light.
There is love in the nightingales' throats,
That sing in the garden so well:
There is love in the face of the moon:
There is love in the warm languid glances
Of the dancers adown the dim dances:
There is love in the low languid notes
That rise into rapture, and swell,
From viol, and flute, and bassoon.

The tree that bends down o'er the water
So black, is a black cypress tree.
And the statue, there, under the terrace,
Mnemosyne's statue must be.
There comes a black gondola slowly
To the Palace in festival there:

And the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Has mounted the black marble stair.

There was nothing but darkness, and midnight,
And tempest, and storm, in the breast
Of the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi,
As his foot o'er the black marble prest:—
The glimmering black marble stair
Where the weed in the green ooze is clinging,
That leads to the garden so fair,
Where the nightingales softly are singing,—
Where the minstrels new music are stringing,
And the dancers for dancing prepare.

There rustles a robe of white satin:
There's a footstep falls light by the stair:
There rustles a robe of white satin:
There's a gleaming of soft golden hair:
And the Lady Irene Ricasoli
Stands near the cypress tree there,—
Near Mnemosyne's statue so fair,—
The Lady Irene Ricasoli,
With the light in her long golden hair.

And the nightingales softly are singing
In the mellow and moonlighted air;
And the minstrels their viols are stringing;
And the dancers for dancing prepare.

"Siora," the Count said unto her,
"The shafts of ill-fortune pursue me;
The old grief grows newer and newer,
The old pangs are never at rest;
And the foes that have sworn to undo me
Have left me no peace in my breast.
They have slander'd, and wrong'd, and malign'd me:
Tho' they broke not my sword in my hand,
They have broken my heart in my bosom
And sorrow my youth has unmann'd.

But I love you, Irene, Irene,
With such love as the wretched alone
Can feel from the desert within them
Which only the wretched have known!
And the heart of Rinaldo Rinaldi
Dreads, Lady, no frown but your own.
To others be all that you are, love—
A lady more lovely than most;
To me—be a fountain, a star, love,
That lights to his haven the lost;
A shrine that with tender devotion,
The mariner kneeling, doth deck
With the dank weeds yet dripping from ocean,
And the last jewel saved from the wreck.

"None heeds us belovéd Irene!
None will mark if we linger or fly.
Amid all the mad masks in yon revel,
There is not an ear or an eye,—
Not one,—that will gaze or will listen;
And save the small star in the sky
Which, to light us, so softly doth glisten,
There is none will pursue us, Irene.
O love me, O save me, I die!
I am thine, O be mine, O belovéd!

"Fly with me, Irene, Irene!
The moon drops: the morning is near,
My gondola waits by the garden
And fleet is my own gondolier!"
What the Lady Irene Ricasoli,
By Mnemosyne's statue in stone,
Where she leaned, 'neath the black cypress tree,
To the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Replied then, it never was known,
And known, now, it never will be.

But the moon hath been melted in morning:
And the lamps in the windows are dead:

And the gay cavaliers from the terrace,
  And the ladies they laugh'd with, are fled;
And the music is husht in the viols:
  And the minstrels, and dancers, are gone;
And the nightingales now in the garden,
  From singing have ceased, one by one:
But the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
  Still stands, where he last stood, alone,
'Neath the black cypress tree, near the water,
  By Mnemosyne's statue in stone.

O'er his spirit was silence and midnight,
  In his breast was the calm of despair.
He took, with a smile, from a casket
  A single soft curl of gold hair,—
  A wavy warm curl of gold hair,
And into the black-bosom'd water
  He flung it athwart the black stair.
The skies they were changing above him;
  The dawn, it came cold on the air;
He drew from his bosom a kerchief—
  "Would," he sighed, "that her face was less fair!
  That her face was less hopelessly fair."
And folding the kerchief, he cover'd
  The eyes of Mnemosyne there.

THE LAST MESSAGE.

Fling the lattice open,
  And the music plain you'll hear;
Lean out of the window,
  And you'll see the lamplight clear.

There, you see the palace
  Where the bridal is to-night.
You may shut the window.
  Come here, to the light.

Take this portrait with you,
  Look well before you go.
She can scarce be alter'd
  Since a year ago.

Women's hearts change lightly
  (Truth both trite and olden !)
But blue eyes remain blue ;
  Golden hair stays golden.

Once I knew two sisters :
  One was dark and grave
As the tomb ; one radiant
  And changeful as the wave.

Now away, friend, quickly !
  Mix among the masks :
Say you are the bride's friend,
  If the bridegroom asks.

If the bride have dark hair,
  And an olive brow,
Give her this gold bracelet ;—
  Come and let me know.

If the bride have bright hair,
  And a brow of snow,
In the great canal there
  Quick the portrait throw :

And you'll merely give her
  This poor faded flower.
Thanks ! now leave your stylet
  With me for an hour.

You're my friend : whatever
  I ask you now to do,
If the case were alter'd,
  I would do for you.

And you'll promise me, my mother
Shall never miss her son,
If anything should happen
Before the night is done.

VENICE.

THE sylphs and ondines,
And the sea-kings and queens,
Long ago, long ago, on the waves built a city,
As lovely as seems
To some bard, in his dreams,
The soul of his latest love-ditty.
Long ago, long ago,—ah! that was long ago!
Thick as gems on the chalices
Kings keep for treasure,
Were the temples and palaces
In this city of pleasure:
And the night broke out shining
With lamps and with festival,
O'er the squares, o'er the streets;
And the soft sea went, pining
With love, thro' the musical,
Musical bridges, and marble retreats
Of this city of wonder, where dwelt the ondines,
Long ago, and the sylphs, and the sea-kings and queens,
—Ah! that was long ago!
But the sylphs and ondines,
And the sea-kings and queens
Are fled under the waves:
And I glide, and I glide
Up the glimmering tide
Thro' a city of graves.
Here will I bury my heart,
Wrapt in the dream it dream'd;

One grave more to the many !
One grave as silent as any ;
Sculptured about with art,—
For a palace this tomb once seem'd.
Light lips have laugh'd there,
Bright eyes have beam'd.
Revel and dance ;
Lady and lover !
Pleasure hath quaff'd there :
Beauty hath gleam'd,
Love woo'd Romance.
Now all is over !
And I glide, and I glide
Up the glimmering tide,
'Mid forms silently passing, as silent as any,
Here, 'mid the waves,
In this city of graves
To bury my heart—one grave more to the many !

ON THE SEA.

Come ! breathe thou soft, or blow thou bold,
Thy coming be it kind or cold,
Thou soul of the heedless ocean wind ;—
Little I rede and little I reck,
Tho' the mast be snapt on the mizen-deck,
So thou blow her last kiss from my neck,
And her memory from my mind !

Comrades around the mast
The welkin is o'ercast :
One watch is wellnigh past—
Out of sight of shore at last !

Fade fast thou falling shore,
With that fair false face of yore,
And the love, and the life, now o'er !

What she sought, that let her have—
The praise of traitor and knave,
The simper of coward and slave,
And the worm that clings and stings—
The knowledge of nobler things.
But here shall the mighty sea
Make moan with my heart in me,
And her name be torn
By the winds in scorn,
In whose march we are moving free.
I am free, I am free, I am free!
Hark! how the wild waves roar!
Hark! how the wild winds rave!
Courage, true hearts and brave,
Whom Fate can afflict no more!

Comrades, the night is long.
I will sing you an ancient song
Of a tale that was told
In the days of old,
Of a Baron blithe and strong,—
High heart and bosom bold,
To strive for the right with wrong!

"Who left his castled home,
When the Cross was raised in Rome,
And swore on his sword
To fight for the Lord,
And the banners of Christendom.
To die or to overcome!

'In hauberk of mail, and helmet of steel,
And armour of proof from head to heel,
Oh, what is the wound which he shall feel?
And where the foe that shall make him reel?
True knight on whose crest the cross doth shine!
They buckled his harness, brought him his steed—
A stallion black of the land's best breed—
Belted his spurs, and bade him God-speed

'Mid the Paynim in Palestine.
But the wife that he loved, when she pour'd him up
A last deep health in her golden cup,
Put poison into the wine.

" So he rode till the land he loved grew dim,
And that poison began to work in him,—
A true knight chaunting his Christian hymn,
With the cross on his gallant crest.
Eastward, aye, from the waning west,
Toward the land where the bones of the Saviour
rest,
And the Battle of God is to win:
With his young wife's picture upon his breast,
And her poison'd wine within.

" Alas! poor knight, poor knight!
He carries the foe he cannot fight
In his own true breast shut up.
He shall die or ever he fight for the Lord,
And his heart be broken before his sword,
He hath pledged his life
To a faithless wife,
In the wine of a poisoned cup!"

Comrade, thy hand in mine!
Pledge me in our last wine,
While all is dark on the brine.
My friend, I reck not now
If the wild night-wind should blow
Our bark beyond the poles:—
To drift thro' fire or snow,
Out of reach of all we know—
Cold heart, and narrow brow,
Smooth faces, sordid souls!
Lost, like some pale crew
From Ophir, in golden galleys,
On a witch's island! who
Wander the Tamarisk alleys,

Where the heaven is blue,
And the ocean too,
That murmurs among the valleys.

"Perisht with all on board!"
So runs the vagrant fame—
Thy wife weds another lord,
My children forget my name,
While we count new stars by night.
Each wanders out of sight
Till the beard on his chin grows white
And scant grow the curls on his head.
One paces the placid hours
In dim enchanted bowers,
By a soft-eyed Panther led
To a magical milk-white bed
Of deep, pale poison-flowers.
With ruin'd Gods one dwells,
In caverns among the fells,
Where, with desolate arms outspread,
A single tree stands dead,
Smitten by savage spells,
And striking a silent dread
From its black and blighted head
Thro' the horrible, hopeless, sultry dells
Of Elephanta, the Red.

BOOK II.

IN FRANCE.

"PRENSUS IN ÆGÆO."

'Tis toil must help us to forget.
In strife, they say, grief finds repose.
Well, there's the game! I throw the stakes:—
A life of war, a world of foes,
A heart that triumphs while it breaks.
Some day I too, perchance, may lose
This shade which memory o'er me throws,
And laugh as others laugh (who knows?)
But ah, 'twill not be yet!

How many years since she and I
Walk'd that old terrace, hand-in-hand!
Just one star in the rosy sky,
And silence on the summer land.
And she?.....
I think I hear her sing
That song—the last of all our songs.
How all comes back!—thing after thing,
The old life o'er me throngs!

But I must to the palace go;
The ambassador's to-morrow:
Here's little time for thought, I know,
And little more for sorrow.

Already in the *porte-cochère*
The carriage sounds . . . my hat and gloves!
I hear my friend's foot on the stair,—
How joyously it moves!
He must have done some wicked thing
To make him tread so light:
Or is it only that the king
Admired his wife last night?
We talk of nations by the way,
And praise the Nuncio's manners,
And end with something fine to say
About the "allied banners."
'Tis well to mix with all conditions
Of men in every station:
I sup to-morrow with musicians,
Upon the invitation
Of my clever friend, the journalist,
Who writes the reading plays
Which no one reads; a socialist
Most social in his ways.
But I am sick of all the din
That's made in praising Verdi,
Who only know a violin
Is not a hurdy-gurdy.

Here oft, while on a nerveless hand
An aching brow reclining,
Thro' this tall window where I stand,
I see the great town shining.
Hard by, the restless Boulevart roars,
Heard all the night thro', even in dreaming:
While from its hundred open doors
The many-headed Life is streaming.
Upon the world's wide thoroughfares
My lot is cast. So be it!
Each on his back his burthen bears,
And feels, though he may not see it.
My life is not more hard than theirs
Who toil on either side:

They cry for quiet in their prayers,
And it is still denied.

But sometimes, when I stand alone,
Life pauses—now and then:
And in the distance dies the moan
Of miserable men.
As in a dream (how strange!) I seem
To be lapsing, slowly, slowly,
From noise and strife, to a stiller life,
Where all is husht and holy.

Ah, love! our way's in a stranger land.
We may not rest together.
For an Angel takes me by the hand,
And leads me .... whither? whither?

À L'ENTRESOL.

One circle of all its golden hours
The flitting hand of the Time-piece there,
In its close white bower of china flowers,
Hath rounded unaware:

While the firelight, flung from the flickering wall
On the large and limpid mirror behind,
Hath redden'd and darken'd down o'er all,
As the fire itself declined.

Something of pleasure, and something of pain
There lived in that sinking light. What is it?
Faces I never shall look at again,
In places you never will visit,

Reveal'd themselves in each faltering ember,
While, under a palely-wavering flame,

Half of the years life aches to remember
Reappear'd, and died as they came.

To its dark Forever an hour hath gone
Since either you or I have spoken:
Each of us might have been sitting alone
In a silence so unbroken.

I never shall know what made me look up
(In this cushion'd chair so soft and deep,
By the table where, over the empty cup,
I was leaning, half asleep)

To catch a gleam on the picture up there
Of the saint in the wilderness under the oak;
And a light on the brow of the bronze Voltaire,
Like the ghost of a cynical joke.

To mark, in each violet, velvet fold
Of the curtains that fall twixt room and room,
The dip and dance of the manifold
Shadows of rosy gloom.

O'er the Rembrandt there—the Caracci here—
Flutter warmly the ruddy and wavering hues;
And St. Anthony over his book has a leer
At the little French beauty by Greuze.

There—the Leda, weigh'd over her white swan's back,
By the weight of her passionate kiss, ere it falls;
O'er the ebony cabinet, glittering black
Thro' its ivory cups and balls:

Your scissors and thimble, and work laid away,
With its silks, in the scented rosewood box;
The journals, that tell truth every day,
And that novel of Paul de Kock's:

The flowers in the vase, with their bells shut close
In a dream of the far green fields where they grew;
The cards of the visiting people and shows
In that bowl with the sea-green hue.

Your shawl, with a queenly droop of its own,
Hanging over the arm of the crimson chair:
And, last—yourself, as silent as stone,
In a glow of the firelight there!

I thought you were reading all this time.
And was it some wonderful page of your book
Telling of love, with its glory and crime,
That has left you that sorrowful look?

For a tear from those dark, deep, humid orbs
'Neath their lashes, so long, and soft, and sleek,
All the light in your lustrous eyes absorbs,
As it trembles over your cheek.

Were you thinking how we, sitting side by side,
Might be dreaming miles and miles apart?
Or if lips could meet over a gulf so wide
As separates heart from heart?

Ah, well! when time is flown, how it fled
It is better neither to ask nor tell.
Leave the dead moments to bury their dead.
Let us kiss and break the spell!

Come, arm in arm, to the window here;
Draw by the thick curtain, and see how, to-night,
In the clear and frosty atmosphere,
The lamps are burning bright.

All night, and forever, in yon great town,
The heaving Boulevart flares and roars;
And the streaming Life, flows up and down
From its hundred open doors.

It is scarcely so cold, but I and you,
With never a friend to find us out,
May stare at the shops for a moment or two,
And wander a while about.

For when in the crowd we have taken our place,
(—Just two more lives to the mighty street there!)
Knowing no single form or face
Of the men and women we meet there,—

Knowing, and known of, none in the whole
Of that crowd all round, but our two selves only,
We shall grow nearer, soul to soul,
Until we feel less lonely.

Here are your bonnet and gloves, dear. There—
How stately you look in that long rich shawl!
Put back your beautiful golden hair,
That never a curl may fall.

Stand in the firelight . . . so, . . . as you were—
Oh my heart, how fearfully like her she seem'd!
Hide me up from my own despair,
And the ghost of a dream I dream'd!

TERRA INCOGNITA.

How sweet it is to sit beside her,
When the hour brings nought that's better!
All day in my thoughts to hide her,
And, with fancies free from fetter,
Half remember, half forget her.
Just to find her out by times
In my mind, among sweet fancies
Laid away:

In the fall of mournful rhymes;
In a dream of distant climes;
In the sights a lonely man sees
At the dropping of the day;
Grave or gay.
As a maiden sometimes locks
With old letters, whose contents
Tears have faded,
In an old worm-eaten box,
Some sweet packet of faint scents,
Silken-braided;
And forgets it:
Careless, so I hide
In my life her love,—
Fancies on each side,
Memories heap'd above:—
There it lies, unspied:
Nothing frets it.
On a sudden, when
Deed, or word, or glance,
Brings me back again
To the old romance,
With what rapture then,—
When, in its completeness,
Once my heart hath found it,
By each sense detected,
Steals on me the sweetness
Of the air around it,
Where it lies neglected!
Shall I break the charm of this
In a single minute?
For some chance with fuller bliss
Proffer'd in it?
Secrets unseal'd by a kiss,
Could I win it!
'Tis so sweet to linger near her,
Idly so!
Never reckoning, while I hear her
Whispering low,

If each whisper will make clearer
Bliss or woe;
Never roused to hope or fear her
Yes or No!
What if, seeking something more
Than before,
All that's given I displace—
Calm and grace—
Nothing ever can restore,
As of yore,
That old quiet face!
Quiet skies in quiet lakes,
No wind wakes,
All their beauty double:
But a single pebble breaks
Lake and sky to trouble;
Then dissolves the foam it makes
In a bubble.
With the pebble in my hand,
Here, upon the brink, I stand;
Meanwhile, standing on the brink,
Let me think!
Not for her sake, but for mine,
Let those eyes unquestion'd shine,
Half divine:
Let no hand disturb the rare
Smoothness of that lustrous hair
Anywhere:
Let that white breast never break
Its calm motion—sleep or wake—
For my sake.
Not for her sake, but for mine,
All I might have, I resign.
Should I glow
To the hue—the fragrance fine—
The mere first sight of the wine,
If I drain'd the goblet low?
Who can know?
With her beauty like the snow,

Let her go! Shall I repine
That no idle breath of mine
Melts it? No! 'Tis better so.
All the same, as she came,
With her beauty like the snow,
Cold, unspotted, let her go!

A REMEMBRANCE.

'Twas eve and May when last, thro' tears,
Thine eyes sought mine, thy hand my hand.
The night came down her silent spheres,
And up the silent land.

In silence, too, my thoughts were furl'd,
Like ring-doves in the dreaming grove.
Who would not lightly lose the world
To keep such love?

But many Mays, with all their flowers,
Are faded since that blissful time—
The last of all my happy hours
I' the golden clime!

By hands not thine these wreaths were curl'd
That hide the care my brows above:
And I have almost gain'd the world,
But lost that love.

As tho' for some serene dead brow,
These wreaths for me I let them twine.
I hear the voice of praise, and know
It is not thine.

How many long and lonely days
I strove with life thy love to gain!

I know my work was worth thy praise;
But all was vain.

Vain Passion's fire, vain Music's art!
For who from thorns grape-bunches gathers?
What depth is in the shallow heart?
What weight in feathers?

As drops the blossom, ere the growth
Of fruit, on some autumnal tree,
I drop from my changed life, its youth
And joy in thee:

And look beyond, and o'er thee,—right
To some sublimer end than lies
Within the compass of the sight
Of thy cold eyes.

With thine my soul hath ceased its strife.
Thy part is fill'd; thy work is done;
Thy falsehood buried in my life,
And known to none.

Yet still will golden memories frame
Thy broken image in my heart,
And love for what thou wast shut blame
From what thou art.

In Life's long galleries, haunting-eyed,
Thy pictured face no change shall show;
Like some dead Queen's who lived and died
An age ago!

MADAME LA MARQUISE.

The folds of her wine-dark violet dress
Glow over the sofa, fall on fall,

As she sits in the air of her loveliness
With a smile for each and for all.

Half of her exquisite face in the shade
Which o'er it the screen in her soft hand flings:
Thro' the gloom glows her hair in its odorous braid:
In the firelight are sparkling her rings.

As she leans,—the slow smile half shut up in her eyes
Beams the sleepy, long, silk-soft lashes beneath;
Thro' her crimson lips, stirr'd by her faint replies,
Breaks one gleam of her pearl-white teeth.

As she leans,—where your eye, by her beauty subdued [white
Droops—from under warm fringes of broidery
The slightest of feet—silken-slipper'd, protrude,
For one moment, then slip out of sight.

As I bend o'er her bosom, to tell her the news,
The faint scent of her hair, the approach of her cheek,
The vague warmth of her breath, all my senses suffuse
With HERSELF: and I tremble to speak.

So she sits in the curtain'd, luxurious light
Of that room, with its porcelain, and pictures, and flowers,
When the dark day's half done, and the snow flutters white,
Past the windows in feathery showers.

All without is so cold,—'neath the low leaden sky!
Down the bald, empty street, like a ghost, the gend'arme
Stalks surly: a distant carriage hums by:—
All within is so bright and so warm!

Here we talk of the schemes and the scandals of court,
How the courtezan pushes: the charlatan thrives:
We put horns on the heads of our friends, just for sport:
Put intrigues in the heads of their wives.

Her warm hand, at parting, so strangely thrill'd mine,
That at dinner I scarcely remark what they say,—
Drop the ice in my soup, spill the salt in my wine,
Then go yawn at my favourite play.

But she drives after noon:—then's the time to behold her,
With her fair face half hid, like a ripe peeping rose,
'Neath that veil,—o'er the velvets and furs which enfold her,
Leaning back with a queenly repose,—

As she glides up the sunlight! . . . You'd say she was made
To loll back in a carriage, all day, with a smile;
And at dusk, on a sofa, to lean in the shade
Of soft lamps, and be woo'd for a while.

Could we find out her heart thro' that velvet and lace!
Can it beat without ruffling her sumptuous dress?
She will show us her shoulder, her bosom, her face;
But what the heart's like, we must guess.

With live women and men to be found in the world—
(—Live with sorrow and sin,—live with pain and with passion,—)

Who could live with a doll, tho' its locks should be
curl'd,
And its petticoats trimm'd in the fashion ?

'Tis so fair! . . would my bite, if I bit it, draw
blood ?
Will it cry if I hurt it ? or scold if I kiss ?
Is it made, with its beauty, of wax or of wood ?
. . . Is it worth while to guess at all this ?

THE NOVEL.

"HERE, I have a book at last—
Sure," I thought, "to make you weep!"
But a careless glance you cast
O'er its pages, half asleep.

'Tis a novel,—a romance,
(What you will) of youth, of home,
And of brilliant days in France,
And long moonlit nights in Rome.

'Tis a tale of tears and sins,
Of love's glory and its gloom;
In a ball-room it begins,
And it ends beside a tomb;

There's a little heroine too,
Whom each chapter leaves more pale;
And her eyes are dark and blue
Like the violet of the vale;

And her hand is frail and fair;
Could you but have seen it lie
O'er the convent deathbed, where
Wept the Nuns to watch her die,

You, I think, had wept as well;
For the patience in her face,
(Where the dying sunbeam fell)
Had such strange heart-breaking grace.

There's a lover, eager, bold,
Knocking at the convent gate:
But that little hand grows cold;
And the lover knocks too late.

There's a high-born lady stands
At a golden mirror, pale;
Something makes her jewell'd hands
Tremble, as she hears the tale

Which her maid (while weaving roses
For the ball, thro' her dark hair)
Mix'd with other news, discloses.
Oh, to-night she will look fair!

There's an old man, feeble-handed,
Counting gold . . . "My son shall wed
With the Princess, as I plann'd it,
Now that little girl is dead."

There's a young man, sullen, husht,
By remorse and grief unmann'd,
With a wither'd primrose crusht
In his hot and feverish hand.

There's a broken-hearted woman,
Haggard, desolate, and wild,
Says . . . "The world hath grown inhuman!
Bury me beside my child."

And the little God of this world
Hears them, laughing in his sleeve.
He is master still in his world,
There's another, we believe.

Of this history every part
You have seen, yet did not heed it;
For 'tis written in my heart,
And you have not learn'd to read it.

AUX ITALIENS.

At Paris it was, at the Opera there;—
And she look'd like a queen in a book that night,
With the wreath of pearl in her raven hair,
And the brooch on her breast, so bright.

Of all the operas that Verdi wrote,
The best, to my taste, is the Trovatore:
And Mario can soothe with a tenor note
The souls in Purgatory.

The moon on the tower slept soft as snow:
And who was not thrill'd in the strangest way,
As we heard him sing, while the gas burn'd low,
"*Non ti scordar di me?*"

The Emperor there, in his box of state,
Look'd grave, as if he had just then seen
The red flag wave from the city-gate,
Where his eagles in bronze had been.

The Empress, too, had a tear in her eye.
You'd have said that her fancy had gone back again,
For one moment, under the old blue sky,
To the old glad life in Spain.

Well! there in our front-row box we sat,
Together, my bride-betroth'd and I:
My gaze was fix'd on my opera-hat,
And hers on the stage hard by.

And both were silent, and both were sad.
Like a queen, she lean'd on her full white arm,
With that regal, indolent air she had;
So confident of her charm!

I have not a doubt she was thinking then
Of her former lord, good soul that he was!
Who died the richest, and roundest of men,
The Marquis of Carabas.

I hope that, to get to the kingdom of heaven,
Thro' a needle's eye he had not to pass.
I wish him well, for the jointure given
To my lady of Carabas.

Meanwhile, I was thinking of my first love,
As I had not been thinking of aught for years,
Till over my eyes there began to move
Something that felt like tears.

I thought of the dress that she wore last time,
When we stood, 'neath the cypress trees, together,
In that lost land, in that soft clime,
In the crimson evening weather:

Of that muslin dress (for the eve was hot)
And her warm white neck in its golden chain:
And her full, soft hair, just tied in a knot,
And falling loose again:

And the jasmin-flower in her fair young breast:
(O the faint, sweet smell of that jasmin-flower!)
And the one bird singing alone to his nest:
And the one star over the tower.

I thought of our little quarrels and strife;
And the letter that brought me back my ring.
And it all seem'd then, in the waste of life,
Such a very little thing!

For I thought of her grave below the hill,
Which the sentinel cypress-tree stands over.
And I thought . . . " were she only living still,
How I could forgive her, and love her !"

And I swear, as I thought of her thus, in that hour,
And of how, after all, old things were best,
That I smelt the smell of that jasmin-flower,
Which she used to wear in her breast.

It smelt so faint, and it smelt so sweet,
It made me creep, and it made me cold !
Like the scent that steals from the crumbling sheet
Where a mummy is half unroll'd.

And I turn'd, and look'd. She was sitting there
In a dim box, over the stage ; and drest
In that muslin dress, with that full soft hair,
And that jasmin in her breast !

I was here : and she was there :
And the glittering horseshoe curved between :—
From my bride-betroth'd, with her raven hair,
And her sumptuous, scornful mien.

To my early love, with her eyes downcast,
And over her primrose face the shade,
(In short from the Future back to the Past)
There was but a step to be made.

To my early love from my future bride
One moment I look'd. Then I stole to the door,
I travers'd the passage ; and down at her side,
I was sitting, a moment more.

My thinking of her, or the music's strain,
Or something which never will be exprest,
Had brought her back from the grave again,
With the jasmin in her breast.

She is not dead, and she is not wed!
  But she loves me now, and she loved me then!
And the very first word that her sweet lips said,
  My heart grew youthful again.

The Marchioness there, of Carabas,
  She is wealthy, and young, and handsome still,
And but for her . . . well, we'll let that pass,
  She may marry whomever she will.

But I will marry my own first love,
  With her primrose face: for old things are best;
And the flower in her bosom, I prize it above
  The brooch in my lady's breast.

The world is fill'd with folly and sin,
  And Love must cling where it can, I say:
For Beauty is easy enough to win;
  But one isn't loved every day.

And I think, in the lives of most women and men,
  There's a moment when all would go smooth and even,
If only the dead could find out when
  To come back, and be forgiven.

But O the smell of that jasmin flower!
  And O that music! and O the way
That voice rang out from the donjon tower
  Non ti scordar di me,
    Non ti scordar di me!

PROGRESS.

When Liberty lives loud on every lip,
But Freedom moans,
Trampled by Nations whose faint footfalls slip
Round bloody thrones;
When, here and there, in dungeon and in thrall,
Or exile pale,
Like torches dying at a funeral,
Brave natures fail;
When Truth, the arm'd archangel, stretches wide
God's tromp in vain,
And the world, drowsing, turns upon its side
To drowse again;
O Man, whose course hath call'd itself sublime
Since it began,
What art thou in such dying age of time,
As man to man?

When Love's last wrong hath been forgotten coldly,
As First Love's face;
And, like a rat that comes to wanton boldly
In some lone place,
Once festal,—in the realm of light and laughter
Grim Doubt appears;
Whilst weird Suggestions from Death's vague Hereafter,
O'er ruin'd years,
Creep, dark and darker, with new dread to mutter
Thro' Life's long shade,
Yet make no more in the chill breast the flutter
Which once they made:
Whether it be,—that all doth at the grave
Round to its term,
That nothing lives in that last darkness, save
The little worm,

Or whether the tired spirit prolong its course
Thro' realms unseen,—
Secure, that unknown world cannot be worse
Than this hath been;
Then when thro' Thought's gold chain, so frail and slender,
No link will meet;
When all the broken harps of Language render
No sound that's sweet;
When, like torn books, sad days weigh down each other
I' the dusty shelf;
O Man, what art thou, O my friend, my brother,
Even to thyself?

THE PORTRAIT.

Midnight past! Not a sound of aught
Thro' the silent house, but the wind at his prayers.
I sat by the dying fire, and thought
Of the dear dead woman upstairs.

A night of tears! for the gusty rain
Had ceased, but the eaves were dripping yet;
And the moon look'd forth, as tho' in pain,
With her face all white and wet:

Nobody with me, my watch to keep,
But the friend of my bosom, the man I love:
And grief had sent him fast to sleep
In the chamber up above.

Nobody else, in the country place
All round, that knew of my loss beside,
But the good young Priest with the Raphael-face,
Who confess'd her when she died.

That good young Priest is of gentle nerve,
And my grief had moved him beyond control;
For his lip grew white, as I could observe,
When he speeded her parting soul.

I sat by the dreary hearth alone:
I thought of the pleasant days of yore:
I said "the staff of my life is gone:
The woman I loved is no more.

"On her cold, dead bosom my portrait lies,
Which next to her heart she used to wear--
Haunting it o'er with her tender eyes
When my own face was not there.

"It is set all round with rubies red,
And pearls which a Peri might have kept.
For each ruby there, my heart hath bled:
For each pearl, my eyes have wept."

And I said--"the thing is precious to me:
They will bury her soon in the churchyard clay;
It lies on her heart, and lost must be,
If I do not take it away."

I lighted my lamp at the dying flame,
And crept up the stairs that creak'd for fright,
Till into the chamber of death I came,
Where she lay all in white.

The moon shone over her winding sheet.
There, stark she lay on her carven bed:
Seven burning tapers about her feet,
And seven about her head.

As I stretch'd my hand, I held my breath;
I turn'd as I drew the curtains apart:
I dared not look on the face of death:
I knew where to find her heart,

I thought, at first, as my touch fell there,
It had warm'd that heart to life, with love;
For the thing I touched was warm, I swear,
And I could feel it move.

'Twas the hand of a man, that was moving slow
O'er the heart of the dead,—from the other side:
And at once the sweat broke over my brow,
"Who is robbing the corpse?" I cried.

Opposite me, by the tapers' light,
The friend of my bosom, the man I loved,
Stood over the corpse, and all as white,
And neither of us moved.

"What do you here my friend?" . . . The man
Look'd first at me, and then at the dead.
"There is a portrait here," he began;
"There is. It is mine," I said.

Said the friend of my bosom, "yours, no doubt,
The portrait was, till a month ago,
When this suffering angel took that out,
And placed mine there, I know."

"This woman, she loved me well," said I.
"A month ago," said my friend to me:
"And in your throat," I groan'd, "you lie!"
He answer'd . . . "let us see."

"Enough!" I return'd, "let the dead decide:
And whose soever the portrait prove,
His shall it be, when the cause is tried,
Where Death is arraign'd by Love."

We found the portrait there, in its place:
We open'd it by the tapers' shine:
The gems were all unchanged: the face
Was—neither his nor mine.

"One nail drives out another, at least!
The face of the portrait there," I cried,
"Is our friend's, the Raphael-faced young Priest,
Who confess'd her when she died."

The setting is all of rubies red,
And pearls which a Peri might have kept.
For each ruby there my heart hath bled:
For each pearl my eyes have wept.

ASTARTE.

When the latest strife is lost, and all is done with,
Ere we slumber in the spirit and the brain,
We drowse back, in dreams, to days that life begun with,
And their tender light returns to us again.

I have cast away the tangle and the torment
Of the cords that bound my life up in a mesh:
And the pulse begins to throb that long lay dormant
'Neath their pressure; and the old wounds bleed afresh.

I am touch'd again with shades of early sadness,
Like the summer-cloud's light shadow in my hair:
I am thrill'd again with breaths of boyish gladness,
Like the scent of some last primrose on the air.

And again she comes, with all her silent graces,
The lost woman of my youth, yet unpossest:
And her cold face so unlike the other faces
Of the women whose dead lips I since have prest.

The motion and the fragrance of her garments
Seem about me, all the day long, in the room:
And her face, with its bewildering old endearments
Comes at night, between the curtains, in the gloom.

When vain dreams are stirr'd with sighing, near the morning,
To my own her phantom lips I feel approach:
And her smile, at eve, breaks o'er me without warning
From its speechless, pale, perpetual reproach.

When Life's dawning glimmer yet had all the tint there
Of the orient, in the freshness of the grass,
(Ah what feet since then have trodden out the print there!)
Did her soft, her silent footsteps fall, and pass.

They fell lightly, as the dew falls, 'mid ungather'd
Meadow-flowers; and lightly linger'd with the dew.
But the dew is gone, the grass is dried and wither'd,
And the traces of those steps have faded too.

Other footsteps fall about me—faint, uncertain,
In the shadow of the world, as it recedes:
Other forms peer thro' the half uplifted curtain
Of that mystery which hangs behind the creeds.

What is gone, is gone forever. And new fashions
May replace old forms which nothing can restore:
But I turn from sighing back departed passions
With that pining at the bosom as of yore.

I remember to have murmur'd, morn and even,
"Tho' the Earth dispart these Earthlies, face from face,

Yet the Heavenlies shall surely join in Heaven,
For the spirit hath no bonds in time or space.

"Where it listeth, there it bloweth; all existence
Is its region; and it houseth, where it will.
I shall feel her thro' immeasurable distance,
And grow nearer and be gathered to her still.

"If I fail to find her out by her gold tresses,
Brows, and breast, and lips, and language of sweet strains,
I shall know her by the traces of dead kisses,
And that portion of myself which she retains."

But my being is confused with new experience,
And changed to something other than it was;
And the Future with the Past is set at variance;
And Life falters with the burthens which it has.

Earth's old sins press fast behind me, weakly wailing:
Faint before me fleets the good I have not done:
And my search for her may still be unavailing
'Mid the spirits that are pass'd beyond the sun.

AT HOME DURING THE BALL.

'Tis hard upon the dawn, and yet
She comes not from the Ball.
The night is cold, and bleak, and wet,
And the snow lies over all.

I praised her with her diamonds on:—
And, as she went, she smiled.
And yet I sigh'd, when she was gone,
Above our sleeping child.

And all night long, as soft and slow
As falls the falling rain,
The thoughts of days gone long ago
Have fill'd my heart again.

Once more I hear the Rhine rush down;
(I hear it in my mind!)
Once more, about the sleeping town,
The lamps wink in the wind.

The narrow, silent street I pass:
The house stands o'er the river:
A light is at the casement-glass,
That leads my soul forever.

I feel my way along the gloom,
Stair after stair, I push the door:
I find no change within the room,
And all things as of yore.

One little room was all we had
For June and for December.
The world is wide, but oh how sad
It seems, when I remember!

The cage with the canary-bird
Hangs in the window still:
The small red rose-tree is not stirr'd
Upon the window-sill.

Wide open her piano stands;
—That song I made to ease
A passing pain while her soft hands
Went faintly o'er the keys!

The fire within the stove burns down;
The light is dying fast.
How dear is all it shines upon,
That firelight of the Past!

No sound! the drowsy Dutch-clock ticks.
Oh, how should I forget
The slender ebon crucifix,
That by her bed is set?

Her little bed is white as snow—
How dear that little bed!
Sweet dreams about the curtains go,
And whisper round her head.

That gentle head sleeps o'er her arm
—Sleeps all its soft brown hair:
And those dear clothes of hers, yet warm,
Droop open on the chair.

Yet warm the snowy petticoat!
The dainty corset too!
How warm the ribbon from her throat,
And warm each little shoe!

Lie soft, dear arm upon the pillow!
Sleep, foolish little head!
Ah, well she sleeps! I know the willow
That curtains her cold bed.—

Since last I trod that silent street
'Tis many a year ago:
And, if I there could set my feet
Once more, I do not know

If I should find it where it was,
That house upon the river:
But the light that lit the casement-glass
I know is dark forever.

Hark! wheels below,... my lady's knock!
—Farewell, the old romance!—
Well, dear, you're late—past four o'clock!—
How often did you dance?

Not cooler from the crowning waltz,
She takes my half the pillow.—
Well,—well!—the women free from faults
Have beds below the willow!

AT HOME AFTER THE BALL.

The clocks are calling Three
Across the silent floors.
The fire in the Library
Dies out; thro' the open doors
The red empty room you may see.

In the Nursery, up stairs,
The child had gone to sleep,
Half-way 'twixt dreams and prayers,
When the Hall-door made him leap
To its thunder unawares.

Like love in a worldly breast,
Alone in my lady's chamber,
The lamp burns low, supprest
Mid satins of broider'd amber,
Where she stands, half undrest:

Her bosom all unlaced:
Her cheeks with a bright red spot:
Her long dark hair displaced,
Down streaming, heeded not,
From her white throat to her waist:

She stands up her full height,
With her ball dress slipping down her,
And her eyes as fix'd and bright
As the diamond stars that crown her—
An awful, beautiful sight.

Beautiful, yes . . . with her hair
So wild, and her cheeks so flusht!
Awful, yes . . . for there
In her beauty, she stands husht
By the pomp of her own despair!

And fixt there, without doubt,
Face to face with her own sorrow,
She will stand, till, from without,
The light of the neighbouring morrow
Creeps in, and finds her out.

With last night's music pealing
Youth's dirges in her ears:
With last night's lamps revealing,
In the charnels of old years,
The face of each dead feeling.

Ay, Madam, here alone
You may think, till your heart is broken,
Of the love that is dead and done,
Of the days that, with no token,
For evermore are gone.—

Weep if you can, beseech you!
There's no one by to curb you:
Your child's cry cannot reach you:
Your lord will not disturb you:
Weep! . . . what can weeping teach you?

Your tears are dead in you.
"What harm, where all things change,"
You say, "if we change too?
——The old still sunny Grange!
Ah, that's far off i' the dew.

"Were those not pleasant hours,
Ere I was what I am?

My garden of fresh flowers!
My milk-white weanling lamb!
My bright laburnum bowers!

"The orchard walls so trim!
The redbreast in the thorn!
The twilight soft and dim!
The child's heart! eve and morn,
So rich with thoughts of *him!*"

Hush! your weanling lamb is dead:
Your garden trodden over.
They have broken the farm shed:
They have buried your first lover
With the grass above his head.

Has the Past, then, so much power,
You dare take not from the shelf
That book with the dry flower,
Lest it make you hang yourself
For being yourself for an hour?

Why can't you let thought be
For even a little while?
There's nought in memory
Can bring you back the smile
Those lips have lost. Just see,

Here what a costly gem
To-night in your hair you wore—
Pearls on a diamond stem!
When sweet things are no more,
Better not think of them.

Are you saved by pangs that pain'd you:
Is there comfort in all it cost you,
Before the world had gain'd you,
Before that God had lost you,
Or your soul had quite disdain'd you?

For your soul (and this is worst
To bear, as you well know)
Has been watching you, from first,
As sadly as God could do;
And yourself yourself have curst.

Talk of the flames of Hell!
We fuel ourselves, I conceive,
The fire the Fiend lights. Well,
Believe or disbelieve,
We know more than we tell!

Surely you need repose!
To-morrow again—the Ball.
And you must revive the rose
In your cheek, to bloom for all.
Not go? . . . why the whole world goes!

To bed! to bed! 'Tis sad
To find that Fancy's wings
Have lost the hues they had.
In thinking of these things
Some women have gone mad.

AU CAFÉ * * *.

A PARTY of friends, all light-hearted and gay,
At a certain French café, where every one goes,
Are met, in a well-curtain'd warm *cabinet*,
Overlooking a street there, which every one knows.

The guests are, three ladies well known and admired:
One adorns the *Lyrique;* one . . . I oft have beheld her

At the *Vaudeville*, with raptures; the third lives retired
"*Dans ses meubles*" . . . (we all know her house)
. . . Rue de Helder.

Besides these is a fourth . . . a young Englishman, lately
Presented the round of the clubs in the town:
A taciturn Anglican coldness sedately
Invests him: unthaw'd by Clarisse, he sits down.

But little he speaks, and but rarely he shares
In the laughter around him; his smiles are but few;
There's a sneer in the look that his countenance wears
In repose; and fatigue in the eyes' weary blue.

The rest are three Frenchmen. Three Frenchmen (thank Heaven!)
Are but rarely morose, with Champagne and Bordeaux:
And their wit, and their laughter, suffices to leaven
With mirth their mute guest's imitation of snow.

The dinner is done: the Lafitte in its basket,
The Champagne in its cooler, is pass'd in gay haste;
Whatever you wish for, you have but to ask it:
Here are coffee, cigars, and liqueurs to your taste.

And forth from the bottles the corks fly; and chilly,
The bright wine, in bubbling and blushing, confounds
Its warmth with the ice that it seethes round: and shrilly
(Till stifled by kisses) the laughter resounds.

Strike, strike the Piano, beat loud at the wall!
Let wealthy old Lycus with jealousy groan
Next door, while fair Chloris responds to the call,
Too fair to be supping with Lycus alone! *

Clarisse, with a smile, has subsided, opprest,—
Half, perhaps, by Champagne . . . half, perhaps, by affection,—
In the arms of the taciturn, cold, English guest,
With, just rising athwart her imperial complexion,

One tinge that young Evian himself might have kist
From the fairest of Mænads that danced in his troop;
And her deep hair, unloosed from its sumptuous twist,
Overshowering her throat and her bosom a-droop.

The soft snowy throat, and the round, dimpled chin,
Upturn'd from the arm-fold where hangs the rich head!
And the warm lips apart, while the white lids begin
To close over the dark languid eyes which they shade!

And next to Clarisse (with her wild hair all wet
From the wine, in whose blush its faint fire-fly gold
She was steeping just now), the blue-eyed Juliette
Is murmuring her witty bad things to Arnold.

Cries Arnold to the dumb English guest . . . "*Mon ami*,
What's the matter? . . . you can't sing . . . well, speak then, at least:

* "*Audeat invidus*
Dementem strepitum Lycus
Et vicina seni non habilis Lyco."—HORACE.

More grave, had a man seen a ghost, could he be?
Mais quel drôle de farceur! . . . comme il a le vin triste!"

And says Charles to Eugene (vainly seeking to borrow
Ideas from a yawn) . . . "At the club there are three of us
With the Duke, and we play lansquenet till to-morrow:
I am off on the spur . . . what say *you?* . . . will you be of us?"

"*Mon enfant, tu me boudes—tu me boudes, cheri,*"
Sighs the soft Celestine on the breast of Eugene;
"*Ah bah! ne me fais pas poser, mon amie,*"
Laughs her lover, and lifts to his lips—the champagne.

And loud from the bottles the corks fly; and chilly
The wine gurgles up to its fine crystal bounds.
While Charles rolls his paper cigars round, how shrilly
(Till kist out) the laughter of Juliette resounds!

Strike, strike the piano! beat loud at the wall!
Let wealthy old Lycus with jealousy groan
Next door, while fair Chloris responds to the call,
Too fair to be supping with Lycus alone.

There is Celestine singing; and Eugene is swearing.—
In the midst of the laughter, the oaths, and the songs,
Falls a knock at the door: but there's nobody hearing:
Each, uninterrupted, the revel prolongs.

Said I . . . "nobody hearing?" . . . one only;—the guest,

The morose English stranger, so dull to the charms
Of Clarisse, and Juliette, Celestine, and the rest;
Who sits, cold as a stone, with a girl in his arms.

Once, twice, and three times, he has heard it repeated;
And louder, and fiercer, each time the sound falls.
And his cheek is death pale, 'mid the others so heated;
There's a step at the door, too, his fancy recalls.

And he rises . . . (just so, an automaton rises,—
Some man of mechanics made up,—that must move
In the way that the wheel moves within him;—there lies his
Sole path fixt before him, below and above).

He rises . . . and, scarcely a glance casting on her,
Flings from him the beauty asleep on his shoulder;
Charles springs to his feet; Eugene mutters of honour;
But there's that in the stranger that awes each beholder.

For the hue on his cheek, it is whiter than whiteness:
The hair creeps on his head like a strange living thing.
The lamp o'er the table has lost half its brightness;
Juliette cannot laugh; Celestine cannot sing.

He has open'd the door in a silence unbroken:
And the gaze of all eyes where he stands is fixt wholly:
Not a hand is there raised; not a word is there spoken:
He has open'd the door; . . . . and there comes thro' it slowly

A woman, as pale as a dame on a tombstone,
With desolate violet eyes, open wide;
Her look, as she turns it, turns all in the room stone:
She sits down on the sofa, the stranger beside.

Her hair it is yellow, as moonlight on water
Which stones in some eddy torment into waves;
Her lips are as red as new blood spilt in slaughter;
Her cheek like a ghost's seen by night o'er the graves.

Her place by the taciturn guest she has taken;
And the glass at her side she has fill'd with Champagne.
As she bows o'er the board, all the revellers awaken.
She has pledged her mute friend, and she fills up again.

Clarisse has awaked; and with shrieks leaves the table.
Juliette wakes, and faints in the arms of Arnold.
And Charles and Eugene, with what speed they are able,
Are off to the club, where this tale shall be told.

Celestine for her brougham, on the stairs, was appealing,
With hysterical sobs, to the surly *concierge*,
When a ray thro' the doorway stole to her, revealing
A sight that soon changed her appeal to "*La vierge.*"

All the light-hearted friends from the chamber are fled:
And the café itself has grown silent by this.

From the dark street below, you can scarce hear a tread,
Save the Gendarme's, who reigns there as gloomy as Dis.

The shadow of night is beginning to flit:
Thro' the gray window shimmers the motionless town.
The ghost and the stranger, together they sit
Side by side at the table:—the place is their own.

They nod and change glances, that pale man and woman;
For they both are well known to each other: and then,
Some ghosts have a look that's so horribly human,
In the street you might meet them, and take them for men.

"Thou art changed, my belov'd! and the lines have grown stronger,
And the curls have grown scanter, that meet on thy brow.
Ah faithless! and dost thou remember no longer
The hour of our passion, the words of thy vow?

"Thy kiss, on my lips it is burning forever!
I cannot sleep calm, for my bed is so cold.
Embrace me! close . . . closer . . . O let us part never,
And let all be again as it once was of old!"

So she murmurs repiningly ever. Her breath
Lifts his hair like a nightwind in winter. And he . . .
"Thy hand, O Irene, is icy as death,
But thy face is unchanged in its beauty to me."

"'Tis so cold, my beloved one, down there, and so drear."
"Ah, thy sweet voice, Irene, sounds hollow and strange!"
"'Tis the chills of the grave that have changed it, I fear:
But the voice of my heart there's no chill that can change."

"Ha! thy pale cheek is flusht with a heat like my own.
Is it breath, is it flame, on thy lips that is burning?
Ha! thy heart flutters wild, as of old, 'neath thy zone.
And those cold eyes of thine fill with passionate yearning."

Thus, embracing each other, they bend and they waver,
And, laughing and weeping, converse. The pale ghost,
As the wine warms the grave-worm within her, grown braver,
Fills her glass to the brim, and proposes a toast.

"Here's a health to the glow-worm, Death's sober lamplighter,
That saves from the darkness below the grave-stone
The tomb's pallid pictures . . . the sadder the brighter;
Shapes of beauty each stony-eyed corpse there hath known:

"Mere rough sketches of life, where a glimpse goes for all,
Which the Master keeps (all the rest let the world have!)

But tho' only rough-scrawl'd on the blank charnel wall,
Is their truth the less sharp, that 'tis sheath'd in the grave?

"Here's to Love . . . the prime passion . . . the harp that we sung to
In the orient of youth, in the days pure of pain;
The cup that we quaff'd in: the stirrup we sprung to,
So light, ere the journey was made—and in vain!

"O the life that we lived once! the beauty so fair once!
Let them go! wherefore weep for what tears could not save?
What old trick sets us aping the fools that we were once,
And tickles our brains even under the grave?

"There's a small stinging worm which the grave ever breeds
From the folds of the shroud that around us is spread:
There's a little blind maggot that revels and feeds
On the life of the living, the sleep of the dead.

"To our friends! . . ." But the full flood of dawn thro' the pane,
Having slowly roll'd down the huge street there unheard,
(While the great, new, blue sky, o'er the white Madelaine
Was wide opening itself) from her lip wash'd the word;

Wash'd her face faint and fainter; while, dimmer and dimmer,
In its seat, the pale form flicker'd out like a flame,

As broader, and brighter, and fuller, the glimmer
Of day thro' the heat-clouded window became.

And the day mounts apace. Some one opens the door.
In shuffles a waiter with sleepy red eyes:
He stares at the cushions flung loose on the floor,
On the bottles, the glasses, the plates, with surprise.

Stranger still! he sees seated a man at the table,
With his head on his hands: in a slumber he seems,
So wild, and so strange, he no longer is able
In silence to thrid thro' the path of his dreams.

For he moans, and he mutters: he moves and he motions:
To the dream that he dreams o'er his wine-cup he pledges.
And his sighs sound, thro' sleep, like spent winds over ocean's
Last verge, where the world hides its outermost edges.

The gas-lamp falls sick in the tube: and so, dying,
To the fumes of spilt wine, and cigars but half-smoked,
Adds the stench of its last gasp: chairs broken are lying
All about o'er the carpet stain'd, litter'd, and soak'd.

A touch starts the sleeper. He wakes. It is day.
And the beam that dispels all the phantoms of night
Thro' the room sends its kindly and comforting ray:
The streets are new-peopled: the morning is bright.

And the city's so fair! and the dawn breaks so brightly!
With gay flowers in the market, gay girls in the street.
Whate'er the strange beings that visit us nightly,
When Paris awakes, from her smile they retreat.

I myself have, at morning, beheld them departing;
Some in masks, and in dominos, footing it on;
Some like imps, some like fairies; at cockcrow all starting,
And speedily flitting from sight one by one.

And that wonderful night-flower, Memory, that, tearful,
Unbosoms to darkness her heart full of dew,
Folds her leaves round again, and from day shrinks up fearful
In the cleft of her ruin, the shade of her yew.

This broad daylight life's strange enough: and wherever
We wander, or walk; in the club, in the streets;
Not a straw on the ground is too trivial to sever
Each man in the crowd from the others he meets.

Each walks with a spy or a jailer behind him;
(Some word he has spoken, some deed he has done;)
And the step, now and then, quickens, just to remind him,
In the crowd, in the sun, that he is not alone.

But 'tis hard, when by lamplight, 'mid laughter and songs too,
Those return, . . . we have buried, and mourn'd for, and pray'd for,

And done with . . . and, free of the grave it belongs to,
Some ghost drinks your health in the wine you have paid for.

Wreathe the rose, O Young Man ; pour the wine.
What thou hast
That enjoy all the days of thy youth. Spare thou nought.
Yet beware ! . . . at the board sits a ghost—'tis the Past ;
In thy heart lurks a weird Necromancer—'tis Thought.

THE CHESS-BOARD.

My little love, do you remember
Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
Those evenings in the bleak December,
Curtain'd warm from the snowy weather,
When you and I played chess together,
Checkmated by each other's eyes ?
Ah, still I see your soft white hand
Hovering warm o'er Queen and Knight.
Brave Pawns in valiant battle stand :
The double Castles guard the wings:
The Bishop bent on distant things,
Moves, sidling through the fight.
Our fingers touch ; our glances meet,
And falter ; falls your golden hair
Against my cheek ; your bosom sweet
Is heaving. Down the field, your Queen
Rides slow her soldiery all between,
And checks me unaware.
Ah me ! the little battle's done,
Disperst is all its chivalry ;
Full many a move, since then, have we

'Mid Life's perplexing checkers made,
And many a game with Fortune play'd,—
What is it we have won?
This, this at least—if this alone;—
That never, never, never more,
As in those old still nights of yore,
(Ere we were grown so sadly wise,)
Can you and I shut out the skies,
Shut out the world, and wintry weather,
And, eyes exchanging warmth with eyes,
Play chess, as then we play'd, together!

SONG.

If Sorrow have taught me anything,
She hath taught me to weep for you;
And if Falsehood have left me a tear to shed
For Truth, these tears are true.
If the one star left by the morning
Be dear to the dying night,
If the late lone rose of October
Be sweetest to scent and sight,
If the last of the leaves in December
Be dear to the desolate tree,
Remember, belov'd, O remember
How dear is your beauty to me!

And more dear than the gold, is the silver
Grief hath sown in that hair's young gold:
And lovelier than youth, is the language
Of the thoughts that have made youth old;
We must love, and unlove, and forget, dear—
Fashion and shatter the spell
Of how many a love in a life, dear—
Ere life learns to love once and love well.

Then what matters it, yesterday's sorrow?
Since I have outlived it—see!
And what matter the cares of to-morrow,
Since you, dear, will share them with me?

To love it is hard, and 'tis harder
Perchance to be loved again:
But you'll love me, I know, now I love you.—
What I seek I am patient to gain.
To the tears I have shed, and regret not,
What matters a few more tears?
Or a few days' waiting longer,
To one that has waited for years?
Hush! lay your head on my breast, there.
Not a word! . . . while I weep for your sake,
Sleep, and forget me, and rest there:
My heart will wait warm till you wake.
For—if Sorrow have taught me anything
She hath taught me to weep for you;
And if Falsehood have left me a tear to shed
For Truth, these tears are true!

THE LAST REMONSTRANCE.

Yes! I am worse than thou didst once believe me.
Worse than thou deem'st me now I cannot be—
But say "the Fiend's no blacker," . . . canst thou leave me?
Where wilt thou flee?

Where wilt thou bear the relics of the days
Squander'd round this dethronéd love of thine?
Hast thou the silver and the gold to raise
A new God's shrine?

Thy cheek hath lost its roundness and its bloom.
Who will forgive those signs where tears have fed

On thy once lustrous eyes,—save *he* for whom
Those tears were shed?

Know I not every grief whose course hath sown
Lines on thy brow, and silver in thy hair?
Will new love learn the language, mine alone
Hath graven there?

Despite the blemisht beauty of thy brow,
Thou would'st be lovely, couldst thou love again;
For Love renews the Beautiful: but thou
Hast only pain.

How wilt thou bear from pity to implore
What once those eyes from rapture could command?
How wilt thou stretch,—who wast a Queen of yore—
A suppliant's hand?

Even were thy heart content from love to ask
No more than needs to keep it from the chill,
Hast thou the strength to recommence the task
Of pardoning still?

Wilt thou to one, exacting all that I
Have lost the right to ask for, still extend
Forgiveness on forgiveness, with that sigh
That dreads the end?

Ah, if thy heart can pardon yet, why yet
Should not its latest pardon be for me?
For who will bend, the boon he seeks to get,
On lowlier knee?

Where wilt thou find the unworthier heart than mine,
That it may be more grateful, or more lowly?

To whom else, pardoning much, become divine
By pardoning wholly?

Hath not thy forehead paled beneath my kiss?
And thro' thy life have I not writ my name?
Hath not my soul signed thine? . . . I gave thee bliss,
If I gave shame:

The shame, but not the bliss, where'er thou goest,
Will haunt thee yet: to me no shame thou hast:
To me alone, what now thou art, thou knowest
By what thou wast.

What other hand will help thy heart to swell
To raptures mine first taught it how to feel?
Or from the unchorded harp and vacant shell
New notes reveal?

Ah, by my dark and sullen nature nurst,
And rock'd by passion on this stormy heart,
Be mine the last, as thou wert mine the first!
We dare not part!

At best a fallen Angel to mankind,
To me be still the seraph I have dared
To show my hell to, and whose love resigned
Its pain hath shared.

If, faring on together, I have fed
Thy lips on poisons, they were sweet at least:
Nor couldst thou thrive where holier Love hath spread
His simpler feast.

Change would be death. Could severance from my side
Bring thee repose, I would not bid thee stay.

My love should meet, as calmly as my pride,
That parting day.

It may not be: for thou couldst not forget me—
Not that my own is more than other natures,
But that 'tis different: and thou wouldst regret me
'Mid purer creatures.

Then, if love's first ideal now grows wan,
And thou wilt love again,—again love me,
For what I am:—no hero, but a man
Still loving thee.

SORCERY.

TO ———.

You're a milk-white Panther:
I'm a Genius of the air.
You're a Princess once enchanted;
That is why you seem so fair.

For a crime untold, unwritten,
That was done an age ago,
I have lost my wings, and wander
In the wilderness below.

In a dream too long indulged,
In a Palace by the sea,
You were changed to what you are
By a mutter'd sorcery.

Your name came on my lips
When I first look'd in your eyes:
At my feet you fawn'd, you knew me
In despite of all disguise.

The black Elephants of Delhi
  Are the wisest of their kind,
And the Libbards of Soumatra
  Are full of eyes behind:

But they guess'd not, they divined not,
  They believed me of the earth,
When I walk'd among them, mourning
  For the region of my birth.

Till I found you in the moonlight.
  Then at once I knew it all.
You were sleeping in the sand here,
  But you waken'd to my call.

I knew why, in your slumber,
  You were moaning piteously:
You heard a sound of harping
  From a Palace by the sea.

Thro' the wilderness together
  We must wander everywhere,
Till we find the magic berry
  That shall make us what we were.

Tis a berry sweet and bitter,
  I have heard; there is but one;
On a tall tree, by a fountain,
  In the desert all alone.

When at last 'tis found and eaten,
  We shall both be what we were;—
You, a Princess of the water,
  I, a Genius of the air.

See! the Occident is flaring
  Far behind us in the skies,
And our shadows float before us.
  Night is coming forth. Arise!

ADIEU, MIGNONNE, MA BELLE.

Adieu, Mignonné, ma belle . . . when you are gone,
Vague thoughts of you will wander, searching love
Thro' this dim heart: thro' this dim room, Mignonne,
Vague fragrance from your hair and dress will move.

How will you think of this poor heart to-morrow,
This poor fond heart with all its joy in you?
Which you were fain to lean on, once, in sorrow,
Though now you bid it such a light adieu.

You'll sing perchance . . . "I pass'd a night of dreams
Once, in an old Inn's old worm-eaten bed,
Passing on life's highway. How strange it seems,
That never more I there shall lean my head!"

Adieu, Mignonne, adieu Mignonne, ma belle!
Ah little witch, our greeting was so gay,
Our love so painless, who'd have thought "Farewell"
Could ever be so sad a word to say?

I leave a thousand fond farewells with you:
Some for your red wet lips, which were so sweet:
Some for your darling eyes, so dear, so blue:
Some for your wicked, wanton little feet:

But for your little heart, not yet awake,—
What can I leave your little heart, Mignonne?
It seems so fast asleep, I fear to break
The poor thing's slumber. Let it still sleep on!

TO MIGNONNE.

At morning, from the sunlight
I shall miss your sunny face,
Leaning, laughing, on my shoulder
With its careless infant grace;
And your hand there,

With its rosy, inside colour,
And the sparkle of its rings;
And your soul from this old chamber
Miss'd in fifty little things,
When I stand there.

And the roses in the garden
Droop stupid all the day,—
Red, thirsty mouths wide open,
With not a word to say!
Their last meaning

Is all faded, like a fragrance,
From the languishing late flowers,
With your feet, your slow white movements,
And your face, in silent hours,
O'er them leaning.

And, in long, cool summer evenings,
I shall never see you, drest
In those pale violet colours
Which suit your sweet face best.
Here's your glove, child,

Soil'd and empty, as you left it,
Yet your hand's warmth seems to stay
In it still, as tho' this moment
You had drawn your hand away;
Like your love, child,

Which still stays about my fancy.
See this little, silken boot.—
What a plaything! was there ever
Such a slight and slender foot?
Is it strange now

How that, when your lips are nearest
To the lips they feed upon
For a summer time, till bees sleep,
On a sudden you are gone?
What new change now

Sets you sighing . . . eyes uplifted
To the starry night above? . . .
"God is great . . . the soul's immortal . . .
Must we die, tho'? . . . Do you love?
One kiss more, then:

"Life might end now!" . . . And next moment,
With those wicked little feet,
You have vanish'd,—like a Fairy
From a fountain in the heat,
And all's o'er, then.

Well, no matter! . . . hearts are breaking
Every day, but not for you,
Little wanton, ever making
Chains of rose, to break them thro'.
I would mourn you,

But your red smile was too warm, Sweet,
And your little heart too cold,
And your blue eyes too blue merely,
For a strong, sad man to scold,
Weep, or scorn, you.

For that smile's soft, transient sunshine
At my hearth, when it was chill,
I shall never do your name wrong,

But think kindly of you still;
And each moment

Of your pretty infant angers,
(Who could help but smile at . . . when
Those small feet would stamp our love out?)
Why, I pass them now, as then,
Without comment.

Only, here, when I am searching
For the book I cannot find,
I must sometimes pass your boudoir,
Howsoever disinclined;
And must meet there

The gold bird-cage in the window,
Where no bird is singing now;
The small sofa, and the footstool,
Where I miss . . . I know not how . . .
Your young feet there,

Silken-soft in each quaint slipper;
And the jewell'd writing-case,
Where you never more will write now;
And the vision of your face,
Just turn'd to me:—

I would save this, if I could, child,
But that's all. . . . September's here!
I must write a book: read twenty:
Learn a language . . . what's to fear?
Who grows gloomy

Being free to work, as I am?
Yet these autumn nights are cold.
How I wonder how you'll pass them!
Ah, . . . could all be as of old!
But 'tis best so.

All good things must go for better,
As the primrose for the rose.
Is love free? why so is life, too!
Holds the grave fast? . . . I suppose
Things must rest so.

COMPENSATION.

WHEN the days are silent all
Till the drear light falls;
And the nights pass with the pall
Of Love's funerals;
When the heart is weigh'd with years;
And the eyes too weak for tears;
And life like death appears;

Is it nought, O soul of mine,
To hear i' the windy track
A voice with a song divine
Calling thy footsteps back
To the land thou lovest best,
Toward the Garden in the West
Where thou hast once been blest?

Is it nought, O aching brow,
To feel in the dark hour,
Which came, tho' call'd, so slow,
And, tho' loath'd, yet lingers slower,
A hand upon thy pain,
Lovingly laid again,
Smoothing the ruffled brain?

O love, my own and only!
The seraphs shall not see
By my looks that life was lonely;
But that 'twas blest by thee.

If few lives have been more lone,
Few have more rapture known,
Than mine and thine, my own!

When the lamp burns dim and dimmer;
And the curtain close is drawn;
And the twilight seems to glimmer
With a supernatural dawn;
And the Genius at the door
Turns the torch down to the floor,
Till the world is seen no more;

In the doubt, the dark, the fear,
'Mid the spirits come to take thee,
Shall mine to thine be near,
And my kiss the first to wake thee.
Meanwhile, in life's December,
On the wind that strews the ember,
Shall a voice still moan . . . "Remember!"

TRANSLATIONS FROM PETER RONSARD.

"*VOICI LE BOIS QUE MA SAINCTE ANGELETTE.*"

HERE is the wood that freshen'd to her song;
See here, the flowers that keep her foot-prints yet;
Where, all alone, my saintly Angelette
Went wandering, with her maiden thoughts, along.

Here is the little rivulet where she stopp'd;
And here the greenness of the grass shows where
She lingered thro' it, searching here and there
Those daisies dear, which in her breast she dropp'd.

Here did she sing, and here she wept, and here
Her smile came back; and here I seem to hear
Those faint half-words with which my thoughts are rife;

Here did she sit; here, childlike, did she dance,
To some vague impulse of her own romance—
Ah, Love, on all these thoughts, winds out my life!

"*CACHE POUR CETTE NUICT.*"

Hide, for a night, thy horn, good Moon! Fair fortune
For this shall keep Endymion ever prest
Deep-dreaming, amorous, on thine argent breast,
Nor ever shall enchanter thee importune.

Hateful to me the day; most sweet the night!
I fear the myriad meddling eyes of day;
But courage comes with night. Close, close, I pray,
Your curtains, dear dark skies, on my delight!

Thou too, thou Moon, thou too hast felt love's power!
Pan, with a white fleece, won thee for an hour;
And you, sidereal Signs in yonder blue,

Favour the fire to which my heart is moved.
Forget not, Signs, the greater part of you
Was only set in heaven for having loved!

"*PAGE SUY MOY.*"

Follow, my Page, where the green grass embosoms
The enamell'd Season's freshest-fallen dew;

Then home, and my still house with handfuls strew
Of frail-lived April's newliest nurtured blossoms.

Take from the wall now, my song-tunéd Lyre;
Here will I sit and charm out the sweet pain
Of a dark eye whose light hath burn'd my brain;
The unloving loveliness of my desire!

And here my ink, and here my papers, place:—
A hundred leaves of white, whereon to trace
A hundred words of desultory woe—

Words which shall last, like graven diamonds, sure;—
That, some day hence, a future race may know
And ponder on the pain which I endure.

"*LES ESPICES SONT A CERES.*"

CERES hath her harvests sweet:
Chlora's is the young green grass:
Woods for Fawns with cloven feet:
His green laurel Phœbus has:
Minerva has her Olive-tree:
And the Pine's for Cybele.

Sweet sounds are for Zephyr's wings:
Sweet fruit for Pomona's bosom:
For the Nymphs are crystal springs
And for Flora bud and blossom:
But sighs and tears, and sad ideas,
These alone are Cytherea's.

"*MA DOUCE JOUVENCE.*"

MY sweet youth now is all done;
The strength and the beauty are gone.

The tooth now is black, and the head now is white,
And the nerves now are loosed: in the veins
Only water (not blood now) remains,
Where the pulse beat of old with delight.

Adieu, O my lyre, O adieu,
You sweet women, my lost loves, and you
Each dead passion! . . . The end creepeth nigher.
Not one pastime of youth has kept pace
With my age. Nought remains in their place
But the bed, and the cup, and the fire.

My head is confused with low fears,
And sickness, and too many years;
Some care in each corner I meet—
And, wherever I linger or go,
I turn back, and look after, to know
If the Death be still dogging my feet:—

Dogging me down the dark stair,
Which windeth, I cannot tell where,
To some Pluto that opens forever
His cave to all comers—Alas!
How easily down it all pass,
And return from it—never, ah never!

BOOK III.

IN ENGLAND.

THE ALOE.

A STRANGER sent from burning lands,
  In realms where buzz and mutter yet
Old gods, with hundred heads and hands,
  On jewell'd thrones of jet,—

(Old gods as old as Time itself,)
  And, in a hot and level calm,
Recline o'er many a sandy shelf
  Dusk forms beneath the palm,—

To Lady Eve, who dwells beside
  The river-meads, and oak-trees tall,
Whose dewy shades encircle wide
  Her old Baronial Hall,

An Indian plant with leaves like horn,
  And, all along its stubborn spine,
Mere humps, with angry spike and thorn
  Arm'd like the porcupine.

In midst of which one sullen bud
  Survey'd the world, with head aslant,
High-throned, and looking like the god
  Of this strange Indian plant.

A stubborn plant, from looking cross
It seem'd no kindness could retrieve!
But for his sake whose gift it was
It pleased the Lady Eve.

She set it on the terraced walk,
Within her own fair garden-ground;
And every morn and eve its stalk
Was duly water'd round.

And every eve and morn, the while
She tended this uncourteous thing,
I stood beside her,—watch'd her smile,
And often heard her sing.

The roses I at times would twist
To deck her hair, she oft forgot;
But never that dark aloe miss'd
The daily watering-pot.

She seem'd so gay,—I felt so sad,—
Her laugh but made me frown the more:
For each light word of hers I had
Some sharp reply in store.

Until she laugh'd . . . "This aloe shows
A kindlier nature than your own" . . .
Ah Eve, you little dream'd what foes
The plant and I had grown!

At last, one summer night, when all
The garden-flowers were dreaming still,
And still the old Baronial Hall,
The oak-trees on the hill,

A loud and sudden sound there stirr'd,
As when a thunder cloud is torn;
Such thunder-claps are only heard
When little gods are born.

The echo went from place to place,
And waken'd every early sleeper.
Some said that poachers in the chase
Had slain a buck—or keeper.

Some hinted burglars at the door:
Some question'd if it had not lighten'd:
While all the maids, as each one swore,
From their seven wits were frighten'd.

The peacocks scream'd, and every rook
Upon the elms at roost did caw:
Each inmate straight the house forsook:
They search'd—and, last,—they saw

That sullen bud to flower had burst
Upon the sharp-leaved aloe there;—
A wondrous flower; whose breath disperst
Rich odours on the air.

A flower, colossal—dazzling white,
And fair as is a Sphinx's face,
Turn'd broadly to the moon by night
From some vast temple's base.

Yes, Eve! your aloe paid the pains
With which its sullen growth you nurst.
But ah! my nature yet remains
As churlish as at first.

And yet, and yet—it might have proved
Not all unworth your heart's approving.
Ah, had I only been beloved,—
(Beloved as I was loving!)

I might have been . . . how much, how much,
I am not now, and shall not be!
One gentle look, one tender touch,
Had done so much for me!

I too, perchance, if kindly tended,
Had roused the napping generation,
With something novel, strange, and splendid,
Deserving admiration:

For all the while there grew, and grew
A germ,—a bud, within my bosom:
No flower, fair Eve!—for, thanks to you,
It never came to blossom.

"MEDIO DE FONTE LEPORUM SURGIT AMARI ALIQUID."

LUCRETIUS.

We walk'd about at Hampton Court,
Alone in sunny weather,
And talk'd—half earnest, and half sport,
Link'd arm in arm together.

I press'd her hand upon the steps.
Its warmest light the sky lent.
She sought the shade: I sought her lips:
We kiss'd: and then were silent.

Clare thought, no doubt, of many things,
Besides the kiss I stole there;—
The sun, and sunny founts in rings,
The bliss of soul with soul there,

The bonnet, fresh from France, she wore,
My praise of how she wore it,
The arms above the carven door,
The orange-trees before it;—

But I could only think, as, mute
I watch'd her happy smile there,

With rising pain, of this curst boot,
That pinch'd me all the while there.

THE DEATH OF KING HACON.

It was Odin that whisper'd in Vingolf,
"Go forth to the heath by the sea;
Find Hacon before the moon rises,
And bid him to supper with me."

They go forth to choose from the Princes
Of Yngvon, and summons from fight
A man who must perish in battle,
And sup where the gods sup to-night.

Leaning over her brazen spear, Gondula
Thus bespake her companions, "The feast
Of the gods shall, in Vingolf, this evening,
O ye Daughters of War, be encreast.

"For Odin hath beckon'd unto me,
For Odin hath whisper'd me forth,
To bid to his supper King Hacon
With the half of the hosts of the North."

Their horses gleam'd white thro' the vapour:
In the moonlight their corselets did shine:
As they waver'd and whisper'd together,
And fashion'd their solemn design.

Hacon heard them discoursing—"Why hast thou
Thus disposed of the battle so soon?
Oh were we not worthy of conquest?
Lo! we die by the rise of the moon."

"It is not the moon that is rising,
But the glory which penetrates death,

When heroes to Odin are summon'd :
Rise Hacon, and stand on the heath !

" It is we," she replied, " that have given
To thy pasture the flower of the fight,
It is we, it is we that have scatter'd
Thine enemies yonder in flight.

" Come now, let us push on our horses
Over yonder green worlds in the east,
Where the great gods are gather'd together,
And the tables are piled for the feast.

" Betimes to give notice to Odin,
Who waits in his sovran abodes,
That the King to his palace is coming
This evening to visit the gods."

Odin rose when he heard it, and with him
Rose the gods, every god to his feet.
He beckon'd Hermoder and Brago,
They came to him, each from his seat.

" Go forth, O my sons, to King Hacon,
And meet him and greet him from all,
A King that we know by his valour
Is coming to-night to our hall."

Then faintly King Hacon approaches,
Arriving from battle, and sore
With the wounds that yet bleed thro' his armour,
Bedabbled and dripping with gore.

His visage is pallid and awful
With the awe and pallor of death,
Like the moon that at midnight arises
Where the battle lies strewn on the heath.

To him spake Hermoder and Brago,
" We meet thee and greet thee from all,

To the gods thou art known by thy valour,
And they bid thee a guest to their hall.

"Come hither, come hither, King Hacon,
And join those eight brothers of thine,
Who already, awaiting thy coming,
With the gods in Walhala recline.

"And loosen, O Hacon, thy corselet,
For thy wounds are yet ghastly to see.
Go pour ale in the circle of heroes,
And drink, for the gods drink to thee."

But he answer'd, the hero, "I never
Will part with the armour I wear.
Shall a warrior stand before Odin
Unshamed, without helmet and spear?"

Black Fenris, the wolf, the destroyer,
Shall arise and break loose from his chain,
Before that a hero like Hacon
Shall stand in the battle again.

"CARPE DIEM."

HORACE.

To-morrow is a day too far
To trust, whate'er the day be.
We know, a little, what we are,
But who knows what he may be?

The oak that on the mountain grows
A goodly ship may be,
Next year; but it as well (who knows?)
May be a gallows-tree.

'Tis God made man, no doubt,—not Chance:
He made us, great and small;
But, being made, 'tis Circumstance
That finishes us all.

The Author of this world's great plan
The same results will draw
From human life, however man
May keep, or break, His law.

The Artist to his Art doth look;
And Art's great laws exact
That those portray'd in Nature's Book,
Should freely move and act.

The moral of the work unchanged
Endures eternally,
Howe'er by human wills arranged
The work's details may be.

"Give us this day our daily bread,
The morrow shall take heed
Unto itself." The Master said
No more. No more we need.

To-morrow cannot make or mar
To-day, whate'er the day be:
Nor can the men which now we are
Foresee the men we may be.

THE FOUNT OF TRUTH.

It was the place by legends told.
I read the tale when yet a child.
The castle on the mountain hold,
The woodland in the wild.

The wrecks of unremember'd days
Were heap'd around. It was the hour
When bold men fear, and timorous Fays
Grow bold, and know their power.

The month was in the downward year.
The breath of Autumn chill'd the sky:
And useless leaves, too early sere,
Mutter'd and eddied by.

It seem'd that I was wending back
Among the ruins of my youth,
Along a wild night-haunted track
To seek the Fount of Truth.

The Fount of Truth—that wondrous fount!
Its solemn sound I seem'd to hear
Wind-borne adown the clouded mount,
Desolate, cold, and clear.

By clues long lost, and found again
I know not how, my course was led
Thro' lands remote from living men,
As life is from the dead.

Yet up that wild road, here and there,
Large, awful footprints did I meet:
Footprints of gods perchance they were,
Prints—not of human feet.

The mandrake underneath my foot
Gave forth a shriek of angry pain.
I heard the roar of some wild brute
Prowling the windy plain.

I reach'd the gate. I blew with power
A blast upon the darkness wide.
"Who art thou?" from the gloomy tower
The sullen warder cried.

"A Pilgrim to the Fount of Truth."
He laugh'd a laugh of scornful spleen.
"Art thou not from the Land of Youth?
Report where thou hast been."

"The Land of Youth! an alien race
There, in my old dominions, reign;
And, with them, one in whose false face
I will not gaze again.

"From to and fro the world I come,
Where I have fared as exiles fare,
Mock'd by the memories of home
And homeless everywhere.

"The snake that slid thro' Paradise
Yet on my pathway slides and slips:
The apple pluck'd in Eden twice
Is yet upon my lips.

"I can report the world is still
Where it hath been since it began:
And Wisdom, with bewildered will,
Is still the same sick man,

"Whom yet the selfsame visions fool,
The selfsame nightmares haunt and scare.
Folly still breeds the Public Fool,
Knowledge increaseth care:

"Joy hath his tears, and Grief her smile;
And still both tears and smiles deceive.
And in the Valley of the Nile
I hear—and I believe—

"The Fiend and Michael, as of yore,
Yet wage the ancient war: but how
This strife will end at last, is more
Than our new sages know."

I heard the gate behind me close.
It closed with a reluctant wail.
Roused by the sound from her repose
Started the Porteress pale:

In pity, or in scorn . . . "Forbear,
Madman," she cried, . . . "thy search for Truth
The curl is in thy careless hair.
Return to Love and Youth.

"What lured thee here, thro' dark, and doubt,
The many-perill'd prize to win?"—
"The dearth" . . . I said . . . "of all without,
The thirst of all within.

"Age comes not with the wrinkled brow
But earlier, with the ravaged heart;
Full oft hath fall'n the winter snow
Since Love from me did part.

"Long in dry places, void of cheer,
Long have I roam'd. These features scan:
If magic lore be thine, look here,
Behold the Talisman!"

I cross'd the court. The bloodhound bay'd
Behind me from the outer wall.
The drowsy grooms my call obey'd
And lit the haunted hall.

They brought me horse, and lance, and helm,
They bound the buckler on my breast,
Spread the weird chart of that wild realm,
And arm'd me for the quest.

Uprose the Giant of the Keep.
"Rash fool, ride on!" . . . I heard him say.
"The night is late, the heights are steep,
And Truth is far away!"

And . . . " Far away ! " . . . the echoes fell
Behind, as from that grisly hold
I turn'd. No tongue of man may tell
What mine must leave untold.

The Fount of Truth—that wondrous fount !
Far off I heard its waters play.
But ere I scaled the solemn mount,
Dawn broke. The trivial day

To its accustom'd course flow'd back,
And all the glamour faded round.
Is it forever lost—that track ?
Or—was it never found ?

MIDGES.

She is talking æsthetics, the dear clever creature !
Upon Man, and his functions, she speaks with a smile.
Her ideas are divine upon Art, upon Nature,
The Sublime, the Heroic, and Mr. Carlyle.

I no more am found worthy to join in the talk, now ;
So I follow with my surreptitious cigar ;
While she leads our poetical friend up the walk, now,
Who quotes Wordsworth and praises her " *Thoughts on a star.*"

Meanwhile, there is dancing in yonder green bower
A swarm of young midges. They dance high and low.
'Tis a sweet little species that lives but one hour,
And the eldest was born half an hour ago.

One impulsive young midge I hear ardently pouring
In the ears of a shy little wanton in gauze,
His eternal devotion; his ceaseless adoring;
Which shall last till the Universe breaks from its laws:

His passion is not, he declares, the mere fever
Of a rapturous moment. It knows no control:
It will burn in his breast thro' existence forever,
Immutably fix'd in the deeps of the soul!

She wavers: she flutters: . . . male midges are fickle:
Dare she trust him her future? . . . she asks with a sigh:
He implores, . . . and a tear is beginning to trickle:
She is weak: they embrace, and . . . the lovers pass by.

While they pass me, down here on a rose leaf has lighted
A pale midge, his feelers all drooping and torn:
His existence is wither'd; its future is blighted:
His hopes are betray'd: and his breast is forlorn.

By the midge his heart trusted his heart is deceived now:
In the virtue of midges no more he believes:
From love in its falsehood, once wildly believed, now
He will bury his desolate life in the leaves.

His friends would console him . . . the noblest and sagest
Of midges have held that a midge lives again;
In Eternity, say they, the strife, thou now wagest
With sorrow, shall cease . . . but their words are in vain!

Can Eternity bring back the seconds now wasted
In hopeless desire? or restore to his breast
The belief he has lost, with the bliss he once tasted,
Embracing the midge that his being loved best?

His friends would console him . . . life yet is before him;
Many hundred long seconds he still has to live:
In the state yet a mighty career spreads before him:
Let him seek in the great world of action to strive!

There is Fame! there's Ambition! and, grander than either,
There is Freedom! . . . the progress and march of the race! . . .
But to Freedom his breast beats no longer, and neither
Ambition nor action her loss can replace.

If the time had been spent in acquiring æsthetics
I have squander'd in learning this language of midges,
There might, for my friend in her peripatetics,
Have been now *two* asses to help o'er the bridges.

As it is, . . . I'll report her the whole conversation.
It would have been longer; but, somehow or other,
(In the midst of that misanthrope's long lamentation,)
A midge in my right eye became a young mother.

Since my friend is so clever, I'll ask her to tell me
Why the least living thing (a mere midge in the egg!)

Can make a man's tears flow, as now it befell me . . .
O you dear clever woman, explain it, I beg!

THE LAST TIME THAT I MET LADY RUTH.

THERE are some things hard to understand.
O help me, my God, to trust in thee!
But I never shall forget her soft white hand,
And her eyes when she look'd at me.

It is hard to pray the very same prayer
Which once at our mother's knee we pray'd—
When, where we trusted our whole heart, there
Our trust hath been betray'd.

I swear that the milk-white muslin so light
On her virgin breast, where it lay demure,
Seem'd to be toucht to a purer white
By the touch of a breast so pure.

I deem'd her the one thing undefiled
By the air we breathe in a world of sin:
The truest, the tenderest, purest child
A man ever trusted in!

When she blamed me (she, with her fair child's face!)
That never with her to the Church I went
To partake of the Gospel of truth and grace,
And the Christian sacrament,

And I said I would go for her own sweet sake,
Tho' it was but herself I should worship there,
How that happy child's face strove to take
On its dimples a serious air!

I remember the chair she would set for me,
By the flowers, when all the house was gone
To drive in the Park, and I and she
Were left to be happy alone.

There she lean'd her head on my knees, my Ruth,
With the primrose loose in her half-closed hands:
And I told her tales of my wandering youth
In the far fair foreign lands.—

The last time I met her was here in town,
At a fancy ball at the Duchess of D,
On the stairs, where her husband was handing her down.
—There we met, and she talk'd to me.

She, with powder in hair, and patch on chin,
And I, in the garb of a pilgrim Priest,
And between us both, without and within,
A hundred years at least!

We talk'd of the House, and the late long rains,
And the crush at the French Ambassador's ball,
And . . . well, I have not blown out my brains.
You see I can laugh. That is all.

MATRIMONIAL COUNSELS.

You are going to marry my pretty relation,
My dove-like young cousin, so soft in the eyes,
You are entering on life's settled dissimulation,
And, if you'd be happy, in season be wise.

Take my counsel. The more that, in church, you are tempted
To yawn at the sermon, the more you'll attend.

The more you'd from milliner's bills be exempted,
The more on your wife's little wishes you'll spend.

You'll be sure, every Christmas, to send to the rector,
A dozen of wine, and a hamper or two,
The more your wife plagues you, the more you'll respect her,
She'll be pleasing your friend, if she's not plaguing you.

For women of course, like ourselves, need emotion;
And happy the husband, whose failings afford
To the wife of his heart, such good cause for commotion,
That she seeks no excitement, save plaguing her lord.

Above all, you'll be careful that nothing offends, too,
Your wife's lady's maid, tho' she give herself airs.
With the friend of a friend it is well to be friends too,
And especially so, when that friend lives upstairs.

Under no provocation you'll ever avow yourself,
A little put out when you're kept at the door,
And you never, I scarcely need say, will allow yourself
To call your wife's mother, a vulgar old bore.

However she dresses, you'll never suggest to her,
That her taste, as to colours, could scarcely be worse,
Of the rooms in your house, you will give up the best to her,
And you never will ask for the carriage, of course.

If, at times with a doubt on the soul, and her future,
Revelation, and reason, existence should trouble you,
You'll be always on guard to keep carefully mute your
Ideas on the subject, and read Dr. W.

Bring a shawl with you, home, when you come from the Club, sir,
Or a ring, lest your wife, when you meet her, should pout;
And don't fly in a rage and behave like a cub, sir,
If you find that the fire, like yourself, has gone out.

In eleven good instances out of a dozen,
'Tis the husband's a cur, when the wife is a cat.
She is meekness itself, my soft-eyed little cousin,
But a wife has her rights, and I'd have you know that.

Keep my counsel. Life's struggles are brief to be borne, friend.
In Heaven there's no marriage nor giving in marriage.
When Death comes, think how truly your widow will mourn, friend,
And your worth not the best of your friends will disparage!

SEE-SAW.

She was a harlot, and I was a thief:
But we loved each other beyond belief:
She lived in the garret, and I in the kitchen,
And love was all that we both were rich in.

When they sent her at last to the hospital,
Both day and night my tears did fall;
They fell so fast that, to dry their grief,
I borrow'd my neighbour's handkerchief.

The world, which, as it is brutally taught,
Still judges the act in lieu of the thought,
Found my hand in my neighbour's pocket,
And clapp'd me, at once, under chain and locket.

When they ask'd me about it, I told them plain,
Love it was that had turn'd my brain:
How should I heed where my hand had been,
When my heart was dreaming of Celestine?

Twelve friends were so struck by my woful air,
That they sent me abroad for change of air:
And, to prove me the kindness of their intent,
They sent me at charge of the government.

When I came back again,—whom, think you, I meet
But Celestine, here, in Regent Street?
In a carriage adorn'd with a coronet,
And a dress, all flounces, and lace, and jet:

For her carriage drew up to the bookseller's door,
Where they publish those nice little books for the poor:
I took off my hat: and my face she knew,
And gave me—a sermon by Mr. Bellew.

But she gave me (God bless her!) along with the [book,
Such a sweet sort of smile, such a heavenly look,
That, as long as I live, I shall never forget
Celestine, in her coach with the earl's coronet.

There's a game that men play at in great London- [town;
Whereby some must go up, sir, and some must go down:

And, since the mud sticks to your coat if you fall,
Why, the strongest among us keep close to the wall.

But some day, soon or late, in my shoes I shall stand,
More exalted than any great Duke in the land;
A clean shirt on my back, and a rose in my coat,
And a collar conferr'd by the Queen round my throat.

And I know that my Celestine will not forget
To be there, in her coach with my lord's coronet:
She will smile to me then, as she smiled to me now:
I shall nod to her gayly, and make her my bow;—

Before I rejoin all those famous old thieves
Whose deeds have immortalized Rome, sir, and Greece:
Whose names are inscribed upon History's leaves,
Like my own on the books of the City Police:—

Alexander, and Cæsar, and other great robbers,
Who once tried to pocket the whole universe:—
Not to speak of our own parliamentary jobbers,
With their hands, bless them all, in the popular purse!

BABYLONIA.

Enough of simpering, and grimace!
Enough of damning one's soul for nothing!
Enough of Vacuity trimm'd with lace!
And Poverty proud of her purple clothing!
In Babylon, whene'er there's a wind,
(Whether it blow rain, or whether it blow sand,)
The weathercocks change their mighty mind;
And the weathercocks are forty thousand.

Forty thousand weathercocks,
Each well-minded to keep his place,
Turning about in the great and small ways!
Each knows, whatever the weather's shocks,
That the wind will never blow in his face;
And in Babylon the wind blows always.

I cannot tell how it may strike you,
But it strikes me now, for the first and last time,
That there may be better things to do,
Than watching the weathercocks for pastime.
And I wish I were out of Babylon,
Out of sight of column and steeple,
Out of fashion and form, for one,
And out of the midst of this double-faced people.
Enough of catgut! Enough of the sight
Of the dolls it sets dancing all the night!
For there is a notion come to me,
As here, in Babylon, I am lying,
That far away, over the sea,
And under another moon and star,
Braver, more beautiful beings are dying
(Dying, not dancing, dying, dying!)
To a music nobler far.

Full well I know that, before it came
To inhabit this feeble, faltering frame,
My soul was weary; and, ever since then,
It has seem'd to me, in the stir and bustle
Of this eager world of women and men,
That my life was tired before it began,
That even the child had fatigued the man,
And brain, and heart, have done their part
To wear out sinew and muscle.

Yet, sometimes, a wish has come to me,
To wander, wander, I know not where,
Out of the sight of all that I see,
Out of the hearing of all that I hear;

Where only the tawny, bold, wild beast
Roams his realms; and find, at least,
The strength which even the beast finds there.
A joy, tho' but a savage joy;—
Were it only to find the food I need,
The scent to track, and the force to destroy,
And the very appetite to feed;
The bliss of the sense without the thought,
And the freedom, for once in my life, from aught
That fills my life with care.

And never this thought hath so wildly crost
My mind, with its wildering, strange temptation,
As just when I was enjoying the most
The blessings of what is call'd Civilization:—
The glossy boot which tightens the foot;
The club at which my friend was black-ball'd
(I am sorry, of course, but one must be exclusive);
The yellow kid glove whose shape I approve,
And the journal in which I am kindly call'd
Whatever's not libellous—only abusive:
The ball to which I am careful to go,
Where the folks are so cool, and the rooms are so hot;
The opera, which shows one what music—is not;
And the simper from Lady .... but why should you know?

Yet, I am a part of the things I despise,
Since my life is bound by their common span:
And each idler I meet, in square or in street,
Hath within him what all that's without him belies,—
The miraculous, infinite heart of man,
With its countless capabilities!
The sleekest guest at the general feast,
That at every sip, as he sups, says grace,
Hath in him a touch of the untamed beast;

And change of nature is change of place.
The judge on the bench, and the scamp at the dock,
Have, in each of them, much that is common to both;
Each is part of the parent stock,
And their difference comes of their different cloth.
'Twixt the Seven Dials and Exeter Hall
The gulf that is fix'd is not so wide:
And the fool that, last year, at Her Majesty's Ball,
Sicken'd me so with his simper of pride,
Is the hero now heard of, the first on the wall,
With the bayonet-wound in his side.

Oh, for the times which were (if any
Time be heroic) heroic indeed!
When the men were few,
And the deeds to do
Were mighty, and many,
And each man in his hand held a noble deed.
Now the deeds are few,
And the men are many,
And each man has, at most, but a noble need.

Blind fool! . . . I know that all acted time
By that which succeeds it, is ever received
As calmer, completer, and more sublime,
Only because it is finish'd: because
We only behold the thing it achieved;
We behold not the thing that it was.
For, while it stands whole, and immutable,
In the marble of memory,—we, who have seen
But the statue before us,—how can we tell
What the men that have hewn at the block may have been?
Their passion is merged in its passionlessness;
Their strife in its stillness closed forever:
Their change upon change in its changelessness:

In its final achievement, their feverish endeavour:
Who knows how sculptor on sculptor starved
With the thought in the head by the hand uncarved?
And he that spread out in its ample repose
That grand, indifferent, godlike brow,
How vainly his own may have ached, who knows,
'Twixt the laurel above and the wrinkle below?

So again to Babylon I come back,
Where this fetter'd giant of Human Nature
Cramp'd in limb, and constrain'd in stature,
In the torture-chamber of Vanity lies;
Helpless and weak, and compell'd to speak
The things he must despise.
You stars, so still in the midnight blue,
Which over these huddling roofs I view,
Out of reach of this Babylonian riot,—
We so restless, and you so quiet,
What is difference 'twixt us and you?

You each may have pined with a pain divine,
For aught I know,
As wildly as this weak heart of mine,
In an Age ago:
For whence should you have that stern repose,
Which, here, dwells but on the brows of those
Who have lived, and survived life's fever,
Had you never known the ravage and fire
Of that inexpressible Desire,
Which wastes and calcines whatever is less
In the soul, than the soul's deep consciousness
Of a life that shall last forever?

Doubtless, doubtless, again and again,
Many a mouth has starved for bread
In a city whose wharves are choked with corn;
And many a heart hath perish'd dead
From being too utterly forlorn,

In a city whose streets are chok'd with men.
Yet the bread is there, could one find it out:
And there is a heart for a heart, no doubt,
  Wherever a human heart may beat;
And room for courage, and truth, and love,
To move, wherever a man may move,
    In the thickliest crowded street.

O Lord of the soul of man, whose will
  Made earth for man, and man for heaven,
Help all thy creatures to fulfil
  The hopes to each one given!
So fair thou mad'st, and so complete,
The little daisies at our feet;
So sound, and so robust in heart,
The patient beasts, that bear their part
In this world's labour, never asking
The reason of its ceaseless tasking;
Hast thou made man, tho' more in kind,
By reason of his soul and mind,
Yet less in unison with life,
By reason of an inward strife,
Than these, thy simpler creatures, are,
Submitted to his use and care?

For these, indeed, appear to live
  To the full verge of their own power,
Nor ever need that time should give
  To life one space beyond the hour.
They do not pine for what is not;
  Nor quarrel with the things which are;
Their yesterdays are all forgot;
  Their morrows are not fear'd from far:
They do not weep, and wail, and moan,
  For what is past, or what's to be,
    Or what's not yet, and may be never;
They do not their own lives disown,
  Nor haggle with eternity
    For some unknown Forever.

Ah yet,—in this must I believe
That man is nobler than the rest:—
That, looking in on his own breast,
He measures thus his strength and size
With supernatural destinies,
Whose shades o'er all his being fall;
And, in that dread comparison
'Twixt what is deem'd and what is done,
He can, at intervals, perceive
How weak, he is, and small.

Therefore, he knows himself a child,
Set in this rudimental star,
To learn the alphabet of Being;
By straws dismay'd, by toys beguil'd,
Yet conscious of a home afar;
With all things here but ill agreeing,
Because he trusts, in manhood's prime,
To walk in some celestial clime;
Sit in his Father's house; and be
The inmate of Eternity.

BOOK IV.

IN SWITZERLAND.

THE HEART AND NATURE.

The lake is calm; and, calm, the skies
In yonder silent sunset glow,
Where, o'er the woodland, homeward flies
The solitary crow;

The woodman to his hut is gone;
The wood-dove in the elm is still;
The last sheep drinks, and wanders on
To graze at will.

Nor aught the pensive prospect breaks,
Save where my slow feet stir the grass,
Or where the trout to diamonds breaks
The lake's pale glass.

No moan the cushat makes, to heave
A leaflet round her windless nest;
The air is silent in the eve;
The world's at rest.

All bright below; all calm above;
No sense of pain, no sign of wrong;
Save in thy heart of hopeless love,
Poor child of Song!

Why must the soul thro' Nature rove,
At variance with her general plan?
A stranger to the Power, whose love
Soothes all save Man?

Why lack the strength of meaner creatures?
The wandering sheep, the grazing kine,
Are surer of their simple natures
Than I of mine.

For all their wants the poorest land
Affords supply; they browse and breed;
I scarce divine, and ne'er have found,
What most I need.

O God, that in this human heart
Hath made Belief so hard to grow,
And set the doubt, the pang, the smart
In all we know—

Why hast thou, too, in solemn jest
At this tormented thinking-power,
Inscribed, in flame on yonder West,
In hues on every flower,

Thro' all the vast unthinking sphere
Of mere material Force without,
Rebuke so vehement and severe
To the least doubt?

And robed the world and hung the night,
With silent, stern, and solemn forms;
And strown with sounds of awe, and might,
The seas and storms;—

All lacking power to impart
To man the secret he assails,
But arm'd to crush him, if his heart
Once doubts or fails!

To make him feel the same forlorn
Despair, the Fiend hath felt ere now,
In gazing at the stern sweet scorn
On Michael's brow.

A QUIET MOMENT.

STAY with me, Lady, while you may!
For life's so sad,—this hour's so sweet;
Ah, Lady,—life too long will stay;
Too soon this hour will fleet.

How fair this mountain's purple bust,
Alone in high and glimmering air!
And see, . . . those village spires, upthrust
From yon dark plain,—how fair!

How sweet yon lone and lovely scene,
And yonder dropping fiery ball,
And eve's sweet spirit, that steals, unseen,
With darkness over all!

This blesséd hour is yours, and eve's;
And this is why it seems so sweet,
To lie, as husht as fallen leaves
In autumn, at your feet;

And watch, awhile released from care,
The twilight in yon quiet skies,
The twilight in your quiet hair,
The twilight in your eyes:

Till in my soul the twilight stays,
—Eve's twilight, since the dawn's is o'er!
And life's too well-known worthless days
Become unknown once more.

Your face is no uncommon face;
  Like it, I have seen many a one,
And may again, before my race
  Of care be wholly run.

But not the less, those earnest brows,
  And that pure oval cheek can charm;—
Those eyes of tender deep repose;
  That breast, the heart keeps warm.

Because a sense of goodness sleeps
  In every sober, soft, brown tress,
That o'er those brows, uncared for, keeps
  Its shadowy quietness:

Because that lip's soft silence shows,
  Tho' passion it hath never known,
That well, to kiss one kiss, it knows——
  ——A woman's holiest one!

Yours is the charm of calm good sense,
  Of wholesome views of earth and heaven,
Of pity, touch'd with reverence,
  To all things freely given.

Your face no sleepless midnight fills,
  For all its serious sweet endeavour;
It plants no pang, no rapture thrills,
  But ah!—it pleases ever!

Not yours is Cleopatra's eye,
  And Juliet's tears you never knew:
Never will amorous Antony
  Kiss kingdoms out for you!

Never for you will Romeo's love,
  From deeps of moonlit musing, break
To poetry about the glove
  Whose touch may press your cheek.

But ah, in one,—no Antony
Nor Romeo now, nor like to these,—
(Whom neither Cleopatra's eye,
Nor Juliet's tears, could please)

How well they lull the lurking care
Which else within the mind endures,—
That soft white hand, that soft dark hair,
And that soft voice of yours!

So, while you stand, a fragile form,
With that close shawl around you drawn,
And eve's last ardours fading warm
Adown the mountain lawn,

'Tis sweet, although we part to-morrow,
And ne'er, the same, shall meet again,
Awhile, from old habitual sorrow
To cease; to cease from pain;

To feel that, ages past, the soul
Hath lived—and ages hence will live;
And taste, in hours like this, the whole
Of all the years can give.

Then, Lady, yet one moment stay,
While your sweet face makes all things sweet,
For ah, the charm will pass away
Before again we meet!

NÆNIÆ.

SOFT, soft be thy sleep in the land of the West,
Fated maiden!
Far lie the flowers, love, and light, on thy breast
Passion-laden,

In the place where thou art, by the storm-beaten strand
Of the moaning Atlantic,
While, alone with my sorrow, I roam thro' thy land,
The belov'd, the romantic!
And thy faults, child, sleep where in those dark eyes Death closes
All their doings and undoings;
For who counts the thorns on last year's perisht roses?
Smile, dead rose, in thy ruins!
With thy beauty, its frailty is over. No token
Of all which thou wast!
Not so much as the stem whence the blossom was broken
Hath been spared by the frost.
With thy lips, and thine eyes, and thy long golden tresses,
Cold . . . and so young too!
All lost, like the sweetness which died with our kisses,
On the lips we once clung to.
Be it so! O too loved, and too lovely, to linger
Where Age in its bareness
Creeps slowly, and Time with his terrible finger
Effaces all fairness.
Thy being was but beauty, thy life only rapture,
And, ere both were over,
Or yet one delight had escaped from thy capture,
Death came,—thy last lover,
And found thee, . . . no care on thy brow, in thy tresses
No silver—all gold there!
On thy lips, when he kiss'd them, their last human kisses
Had scarcely grown cold there.
Thine was only earth's joy, not its sorrow, its sinning,
Its friends that are foes too.

Oh fair was thy life in its lovely beginning,
And fair in its close too!
But I? . . . since we parted, both mournful and many
Life's changes have been to me:
And of all the love-garlands Youth wove me, not any
Remain that are green to me.
Oh, where are the nights, with thy touch, and thy breath in them,
Faint with heart-beating?
The fragrance, the darkness, the life and the death in them,
—Parting and meeting?
All the world ours in that hour! . . . oh, the silence,
The moonlight, and, far in it,
Oh the one nightingale singing a mile hence!
The oped window—one star in it!
Sole witness of stolen sweet moments, unguest of
By the world in its primness;—
Just one smile to adore by the starlight: the rest of
Thy soul in the dimness!
If I glide thro' the door of thy chamber, and sit there,
The old, faint, uncertain
Fragrance, that follow'd thee, surely will flit there,—
O'er the chairs,—in the curtain:—
But thou? . . . O thou miss'd, and thou mourn'd, one! oh never,
Nevermore, shall we rove
Thro' chamber, or garden, or by the dark river
Soft lamps burn above!
O dead, child, dead, dead—all the shrunken romance
Of the dream life begun with!
But thou, love, canst alter no more—smile or glance;
Thy last change is done with.
As a moon that is sunken, a sunset that's o'er,
So thy face keeps the semblance

Of the last look of love, the last grace that it wore,
In my mourning remembrance.
As a strain from the last of thy songs, when we parted,
Whose echoes thrill yet,
Thro' the long dreamless nights of sad years, lonely-hearted,
With their haunting regret,—
Tho' nerveless the hand now, and shatter'd the lute too,
Once vocal for me,
There floats thro' life's ruins, when all's dark and mute too,
The music of thee!
Beauty, how brief! Life, how long! . . . well, love's done now!
Down the path fate arranged for me
I tread faster, because I must tread it alone now.
—This is all that is changed for me.
My heart must have broken, ere I broke the fetter
Thyself didst undo, love.
—Ah, there's many a purer, and many a better,
But more loved, . . . oh, how few, love!—

BOOK V.

IN HOLLAND.

AUTUMN.

So now, then, Summer's over—by degrees.
Hark! 'tis the wind in yon red region grieves.
Who says the world grows better, growing old?
See! what poor trumpery on those pauper trees,
That cannot keep, for all their fine gold leaves,
Their last bird from the cold.

This is Dame Nature, pucker'd, pinch'd, and sour,
Of all the charms, her poets praised, bereft,
Scowling, and scolding (only hear her, there!)
Like that old spiteful Queen, in her last hour,
Whom Spenser, Shakespeare sung to . . . nothing left
But wrinkles, and red hair!

LEAFLESS HOURS.

The pale sun, thro' the spectral wood,
Gleams sparely, where I pass:
My footstep, silent as my mood,
Falls in the silent grass.

Only my shadow points before me,
Where I am moving now:
Only sad memories murmur o'er me
From every leafless bough:
And out of the nest of last year's Redbreast
Is stolen the very snow.

ON MY TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR.

The night's in November: the winds are at strife:
The snow's on the hill, and the ice on the mere:
The world to its winter is turn'd: and my life
To its twenty-fourth year.

The swallows are flown to the south long ago:
The roses are fallen: the woodland is sere.
Hope's flown with the swallows: Love's rose will not grow
In my twenty-fourth year.

The snow on the threshold: the cold at the heart:
But the fagot to warm, and the wine-cup to cheer:
God's help to look up to: and courage to start
On my twenty-fourth year.

And 'tis well that the month of the roses is o'er!
The last, which I pluck'd for Neræa to wear,
She gave her new lover. A man should do more
With his twenty-fourth year

Than mourn for a woman, because she's unkind,
Or pine for a woman, because she is fair.
Ah, I loved you Neræa! But now . . . never mind,
'Tis my twenty-fourth year!

What a thing! to have done with the follies of
Youth,
Ere Age brings ITS follies! . . . tho' many a tear
It should cost, to see Love fly away, and find Truth
In one's twenty-fourth year.

The Past's golden valleys are drain'd. I must plant
On the Future's rough upland new harvests, I fear.
Ho, the plough and the team! . . . who would perish of want
In his twenty-fourth year?

Man's heart is a well, which forever renews
The void at the bottom, no sounding comes near:
And Love does not die, tho' its object I lose
In my twenty-fourth year.

The great and the little are only in name.
The smoke from my chimney casts shadows as drear
On the heart, as the smoke from Vesuvius in flame:
And my twenty-fourth year,

From the joys that have cheer'd it, the cares that have troubled,
What is wise to pursue, what is well to revere,
May judge all as fully as tho' life were doubled
To its forty-eighth year.

If the prospect grow dim, 'tis because it grows wide.
Every loss hath its gain. So, from sphere on to sphere,
Man mounts up the ladder of Time: so I stride
Up my twenty-fourth year!

Exulting? . . . no . . . sorrowing? . . . . no . . . . with a mind
Whose regret chastens hope, whose faith triumphs o'er fear:

Not repining: not confident: no, but resign'd
To my twenty-fourth year.

JACQUELINE,

COUNTESS OF HOLLAND AND HAINAULT.*

Is it the twilight, or my fading sight,
Makes all so dim around me? No, the night
Is come already. See! thro' yonder pane,
Alone in the gray air, that star again—
Which shines so wan, I used to call it mine
For its pale face; like Countess Jacqueline
Who reign'd in Brabant once . . . that's years ago.
I call'd so much mine, then: so much seem'd so!
And see, my own!—of all those things, my star
(Because God hung it there, in heaven, so far
Above the reach and want of those hard men)
Is all they have not taken from me. Then
I call it still My Star. Why not? The dust
Hath claim'd the dust: no more. And moth and rust
May rot the throne, the kingly purple fray:—
What then? Yon star saw kingdoms roll'd away
Ere mine was taken from me. It survives.
But think, Belov'd,—in that high life of lives,
When our souls see the suns themselves burn low
Before that Sun of Righteousness,—and know
What is, and was, before the suns were lit—
How Love is all in all . . . Look, look at it,

* Who was married to the impotent and worthless John of Brabant, affianced to "good Duke Humphry," of Gloucester, and finally wedded to Frank von Borselen, a gentleman of Zealand, in consequence of which marriage she lost even the title of Countess. She died at the age of thirty-six, after a life of unparalleled adventure and misfortune. See any Biographical Dictionary, or any History of the Netherlands.

My star—God's star—for being God's 'tis mine:
Had it been man's . . . no matter . . . see it shine—
The old wan beam, which I have watch'd ere now
So many a wretched night, when this poor brow
Ach'd 'neath the sorrows of its thorny crown.
Its crown! . . . ah, droop not, dear, those fond eyes down.
No gem in all that shatter'd coronet
Was half so precious as the tear which wet
Just now this pale sick forehead. O my own,
My husband, need was, that I should have known
Much sorrow,—more than most Queens—all know some,—
Ere, dying, I could bless thee for the home
Far dearer than the Palace,—call thy tear,
The costliest gem that ever sparkled here.

Enfold me, my Belovéd. One more kiss.
Oh, I must go! 'Twas will'd I should not miss
Life's secret, ere I left it. And now see—
My lips touch thine—thine arm encircles me—
The secret's found—God beckons—I must go.
Earth's best is given.—Heaven's turn is come to show
How much its best earth's best may yet exceed,
Lest earth's should seem the very best indeed.
So we must part a little; but not long.
I seem to see it all. My lands belong
To Philip still; but thine will be my grave,
(The only strip of land which I could save!)
Not much, but wide enough for some few flowers,
Thou'lt plant there, by and by, in later hours:
Duke Humphry, when they tell him I am dead
(And so young too!) will sigh, and shake his head,
And if his wife should chide, "Poor Jacqueline,"
He'll add, "you know she never could be mine."
And men will say, when some one speaks of me,
"Alas, it was a piteous history,
The life of that poor Countess!" For the rest

Will never know, my love, how I was blest.
Some few of my poor Zealanders, perchance,
Will keep kind memories of me; and in France
Some minstrel sing my story. Pitiless John
Will prosper still, no doubt, as he has done,
And still praise God with blood upon the Rood.
Philip will, doubtless, still be call'd "The Good."
And men will curse and kill: and the old game
Will weary out new hands: the love of fame
Will sow new sins: thou wilt not be renown'd:
And I shall lie quite quiet under ground.
My life is a torn book. But at the end
A little page, quite fair, is saved, my friend,
Where thou didst write thy name. No stain is there,
No blot,—from marge to marge, all pure—no tear;—
The last page, saved from all, and writ by thee,
Which I shall take safe up to Heaven with me.
All's not in vain, since this be so. Dost grieve?
Belovéd, I beseech thee to believe
Altho' this be the last page of my life,
It is my heart's first, only one. Thy wife,
Poor tho' she be, O thou sole wealth of mine,
Is happier than the Countess Jacqueline!

And since my heart owns thine, say—am I not
A Queen, my chosen, tho' by all forgot?
Tho' all forsake, yet is not this thy hand?
I, a lone wanderer in a darken'd land,
I, a poor pilgrim with no staff of hope,
I, a late traveller down the evening slope,
Where any spark, the glow-worm's by the way,
Had been a light to bless... have I, oh say,
Not found, Belovéd, in thy tender eyes,
A light more sweet than morning's? As there dies
Some day of storm all glorious in its even,
My life grows loveliest as it fades in heaven.

This earthly house breaks up. This flesh must
fade.
So many shocks of grief slow breach have made
In the poor frame. Wrongs, insults, treacheries,
Hopes broken down, and memory which sighs
In, like a night wind! Life was never meant
To bear so much in such frail tenement.
Why should we seek to patch and plaster o'er
This shatter'd roof, crusht windows, broken door,
The light already shines thro'? Let them break!

Yet would I gladly live for thy dear sake,
O my heart's first and last, if that could be!
In vain!... yet grieve not thou. I shall not see
England again, and those white cliffs; nor ever
Again those four gray towers beside the river,
And London's roaring bridges: never more
Those windows with the market-stalls before,
Where the red-kirtled market-girls went by
In the great square, beneath the great gray sky,
In Brussels: nor in Holland, night or day,
Watch those long lines of siege, and fight at bay
Among my broken army, in default
Of Gloucester's failing forces from Hainault:
Nor shall I pace again those gardens green,
With their clipt alleys, where they call'd me Queen,
In Brabant once. For all these things are gone;
But thee I shall behold, my chosen one,
Tho' we should seem whole worlds on worlds apart,
Because thou wilt be ever in my heart.
Nor shall I leave thee wholly. I shall be
An evening thought,—a morning dream to thee,—
A silence in thy life when, thro' the night,
The bell strikes, or the sun, with sinking light,
Smites all the empty windows. As there sprout
Daisies, and dimpling tufts of violets, out
Among the grass where some corpse lies asleep,
So round thy life, where I lie buried deep,
A thousand little tender thoughts shall spring,

A thousand gentle memories wind, and cling.
Oh, promise me, my own, before my soul
Is houseless,—let the great world turn and roll
Upon its way unvext.... Its pomps, its powers!
The dust says to the dust,..." the earth is ours."
I would not, if I could, be Queen again
For all the walls of the wide world contain.
Be thou content with silence. Who would raise
A little dust and noise of human praise,
If he could see, in yonder distance dim,
The silent eye of God that watches him?
Oh! couldst thou see all that I see to-night
Upon the brinks of the great Infinite!

"Come out of her, my people, lest ye be
Partakers of her sins!".... My love, but we
Our treasure where no thieves break in and steal
Have stored, I trust. Earth's weal is not our weal.
Let the world mind its business—peace or war;
Ours is elsewhere. Look, look,—my star, my star!
It grows, it glows, it spreads in light unfurl'd;—
Said I "my star?" No star—a world—God's world!
What hymns adown the jasper sea are roll'd,
Even to these sick pillows! Who enfold
White wings about me? Rest, rest, rest....I come!
O Love! I think that I am near my home.
Whence was that music? Was it Heaven's I heard?
Write "Blesséd are the dead that die i' the Lord,
Because they rest,"... because their toil is o'er.
The voice of weeping shall be heard no more
In the Eternal city. Neither dying
Nor sickness, pain nor sorrow, neither crying,
For God shall wipe away all tears. Rest, rest,
Thy hand, my husband,—so—upon thy breast!

MACROMICROS.

It is the star of solitude,
Alight in yon lonely sky.
The sea is silent in its mood,
Motherlike moaning a lullaby,
To hush the hungering mystery
To sleep on its breast subdued.
The night is alone, and I.

It is not the scene I am seeing,
The lonely sky and the sea,
It is the pathos of Being
That is making so dark in me
This silent and solemn hour:—
The bale of baffled power,
The wail of unbaffled desire,
The fire that must ever devour
The source by which it is fire.

My spirit expands, expands!
I spread out my soul on the sea.
I feel for yet unfound lands,
And I find but the land where She
Sits, with her sad white hands,
At her golden broidery,
In sight of the sorrowful sands,
In an antique gallery,
Where, ever beside her, stands
(Moodily mimicking me)
The ghost of a something her heart demands
For a blessing which cannot be.

And broider, broider by night and day
The brede of thy blazing broidery!
Till thy beauty be wholly woven away
Into the desolate tapestry.

Let the thread be scarlet, the gold be gay,
For the damp to dim, and the moth to fray:
  Weave in the azure, and crimson, and green!
Till the slow threads, needling out and in,
To take a fashion and form begin:
Yet, for all the time and toil, I see
The work is vain, and will not be
  Like what it was meant to have been.

O woman, woman, with face so pale!
  Pale woman, weaving away
    A frustrate life at a lifeless loom,
Early or late, 'tis of little avail
    That thou lightest the lamp in the gloom.
Full well, I see, there is coming a day
  When the work shall forever rest incomplete.
Fling, fling the foolish blazon away,
  And weave me a winding sheet!

It is not for thee, in this dreary hour,
  That I walk, companionless here by the shore.
I am caught in the eddy and whirl of a power
Which is not grief, and is not love,
  Tho' it loves, and grieves,
Within me, without me, wherever I move
  In the going out of the ghostly eves,
    And is changing me more and more.
I am not mourning for thee, altho'
  I love thee, and thou art lost:
Nor yet for myself, albeit I know
  That my life is flaw'd and crost:
But for that sightless, sorrowing Soul
  That is feeling, blind with immortal pain,
  All round, for what it can never attain;
That prison'd, pining, and passionate soul,
  So vast, and yet so small;
  That seems, now nothing, now all,
That moves me to pity beyond control,
    And repulses pity again.

I am mourning, since mourn I must,
  With those patient Powers that bear,
  'Neath the unattainable stars up there,
With the pomp and pall of funeral,
Subject and yet august,
The weight of this world's dust:—

The ruin'd giant under the rock:
  The stricken spirit below the ocean:
And the wing'd things wounded of old by the
  shock
  That set the earth in motion.

Ah yet, . . . and yet, and yet,
  If She were here with me,
  If she were here by the sea,
With the face I cannot forget,
  Then all things would not be
So fraught with own regret,
  But what I should feel, and see,
And seize it at last, at last,—
The secret known and lost in the past,
  To unseal the Genii that sleep
  In vials long hid in the deep;
By forgotten, fashionless spells held fast,
Where thro' streets of the cities of coral, aghast,
  The sea-nymphs wander and weep.

MYSTERY.

The hour was one of mystery,
When we were sailing, I and she,
  Down the dark, the silent stream.
The stars above were pale with love,
And a wizard wind did faintly move,
  Like a whisper thro' a dream.

Her head was on my breast,
  Her loving little head!
Her hand in mine was prest,
  And not a word we said;
But round and round the night we wound,
  Till we came at last to the Isle of Fays;
And, all the while, from the magic isle,
  Came that music, that music of other days!

The lamps in the garden gleam'd.
  The Palace was all alight.
The sound of the viols stream'd
  Thro' the windows over the night.
We saw the dancers pass
  At the windows, two by two.
The dew was on the grass,
  And the glow-worm in the dew.

We came thro' the grass to the cypress-tree.
We stood in its shadow, I and she.
"Thy face is pale, thine eyes are wild.
  What aileth thee, what aileth thee?"

"Nought aileth me," she murmur'd mild,
"Only the moonlight makes me pale;
The moonlight, shining thro' the veil
  Of this black cypress-tree."

"By yonder moon, whose light so soon
  Will fade upon the gloom,
And this black tree, whose mystery
  Is mingled with the tomb,—
By Love's brief moon, and Death's dark tree,
Lovest thou me?"

Upon my breast she lean'd her head;
  "By yonder moon and tree,
I swear that all my soul," she said,
  "Is given to thee."

"I know not what thy soul may be,
Nor canst thou make it mine.
Yon stars may all be worlds: for me
Enough to know they shine.
Thou art mine evening star. I know
At dawn star-distant thou wilt be:
I shall not hear thee murmuring low;
Thy face I shall not see.
I love thy beauty: 'twill not stay:
Let it be all mine while it may.
I have no bliss save in the kiss
Thou givest me."

We came to the statue carved in stone,
Over the fountain. We stood there alone.

"What aileth thee, that thou dost sigh?
And why is thy hand so cold?"
"'Tis the fountain that sighs," . . . she said, . . .
"not I;
And the statue, whose hand thou dost hold."

"By yonder fount, that flows forever,
And this statue, that cannot move,—
By the fountain of Time, that ceases never,
And the fixedness of Love,—
By motion and immutability
Lovest thou me?"

"By the fountain of Time, with its ceaseless flow,
And the image of Love that rests," sigh'd she,
"I love thee I swear, come joy, come woe
For eternity!"

"Eternity is a word so long
That I cannot spell it now:
For the nightingale is singing her song
From yon pomegranate bough.
Let it mean what it may—Eternity,

If thou lovest me now as I love thee,
As I love thee!"

We came to the Palace. We mounted the stair.
The great hall-doors wide open were.
And all the dancers that danced in the hall
Greeted us to the festival.

There were ladies, as fair as fair might be,
But not one of them all was fair as she.
There were knights, that look'd at them lovingly,
But not one of them all was loving as I.

Only, each noble cavalier
Had his throat red-lined from ear to ear;
'Twas a collar of merit, I have heard,
Which a Queen upon each had once conferr'd.
And each lovely lady that oped her lip
Let a little mouse's tail outslip;
'Twas the fashion there, I know not why,
But fashions are changing constantly.
From the crescented naptha lamps each ray
Stream'd into a still enchanted blaze;—
And forth from the deep-toned Orchestra
That music, that music of other days!

My arm enlaced her winsome waist,
And down the dance we flew:
We flew, we raced: our lips embraced:
And our breath was mingled too.
Round, and round, to a magic sound—
(A wizard waltz to a wizard air!)
Round and round we whirl'd, we wound,
In a circle light and fine:
My cheek was fann'd by her fragrant hair,
And her bosom beat on mine:
And all the while, in the winding ways,
That music, that music of other days,
With its melodies divine!

The palace clock stands in the hall,
And talks, unheard, of the flight of time:
With a face too pale for a festival
It telleth a tale too sad for rhyme.

The palace clock, with a silver note,
Is chanting the death of the hour that dies.
"What aileth thee? for I see float
A shade into thine eyes."

"Nought aileth me," . . . low murmur'd she,
"I am faint with the dance, my love,
Give me thine arm: the air is warm:
Lead me unto the grove."

We wander'd into the grove. We found
A bower by woodbine woven round.

Upon my breast she lean'd her head:
I drew her into the bower apart.
"I swear to thee, my love," she said,
"Thou hast my heart!"

"Ah, leave thy little heart at rest!
For it is so light, I think, so light,
Some wind would blow it away to-night,
If it were not safe in thy breast.
But the wondrous brightness on thine hair
Did never seem more bright:
And thy beauty never look'd more fair
Than thy beauty looks to-night:
And this dim hour, and this wild bower,
Were made for our delight:
Here will we stay, until the day,
In yon dark east grows white."

"This may not be," . . . she answered me,
"For I was lately wed
With a diamond ring to an Ogre-king,

And I am his wife," . . . she said.
" My husband is old; but his crown is of gold:
And he hath a cruel eye:
And his arm is long, and his hand is strong,
And his body is seven ells high:
And alas! I fear, if he found us here,
That we both should surely die.

" All day I take my harp, and play
To him on a golden string:
Thorough the weary livelong day
I play to him, and sing:
I sing to him till his white hair
Begins to curl and creep:
And his wrinkles old slowly unfold,
And his brows grow smooth as sleep.
But at night, when he calls for his golden cup,
Into his wine I pour
A juice which he drinks duly up,
And sleeps till the night is o'er.
For one moment I wait: I look at him straight,
And tell him for once how much I detest him:
I have no fear lest he should hear,
The drug he hath drain'd hath so opprest him.
Then, finger on lip, away I slip,
And down the hills, till I reach the stream:
I call to thee clear, till the boat appear,
And we sail together thro' dark and dream.
And sweet it is, in this Isle of Fays,
To wander at will thro' a garden of flowers,
While the flowers that bloom, and the lamps that blaze,
And the very nightingales seem ours!
And sweeter it is, in the winding ways
Of the waltz, while the music falls in showers,
While the minstrel plays, and the moment stays,
And the sweet brief rapture of love is ours!

" But the night is far spent; and before the first rent

In yon dark blue sky overhead,
My husband will wake, and the spell will break,
And peril is near," . . . she said.
" For if he should wake, and not find me,
By bower and brake, thoro' bush and tree,
He will come to seek me here;
And the Palace of Fays, in one vast blaze,
Will sink and disappear;
And the nightingales will die in the vales,
And all will be changed and drear!
For the fays, and elves, can take care of themselves:
They will slip on their slippers, and go:
In their little green cloaks they will hide in the oaks,
And the forests and brakes, for their sweet sakes,
Will cover and keep them, I know.
And the knights, with their spurs, and velvets and furs,
Will take off their heads, each one,
And to horse, and away, as fast as they may,
Over brook, and bramble, and stone:
And each dame of the house has a little dun mouse,
That will whisper her when to be gone;
But we, my love, in this desolate grove,
We shall be left alone;
And my husband will find us, take us and bind us:
In his cave he will lock me up,
And pledge me for spite in thy blood by night
When he drains down his golden cup."

" Thy husband, dear, is a monster, 'tis clear,
But just now I will not tarry
Thy choice to dispute—how on earth such a brute
Thou hadst ever the fancy to marry.
For wherefore, meanwhile, are we two here,
In a fairy island under a spell,
By night, in a magical atmosphere,
In a lone enchanted dell,

If we are to say and do no more
  Than is said and done by the dull daylight,
In that dry old world, where both must ignore,
  To-morrow, the dream of to-night."

Her head droop'd on my breast,
  Fair foolish little head!
Her lips to mine were prest.
  Never a word was said.

If it were but a dream of the night,
  A dream that I dream'd in sleep—
Why, then, is my face so white,
  And this wound so red and deep?
But whatever it was, it all took place
  In a land where never your steps will go,
Tho' they wander, wherever they will, thro' space;
  In an hour you never will know,
  Tho' you should outlive the crow
That is like to outlive your race.

And if it were but a dream, it broke
Too soon, albeit too late I woke,
Waked by the smart of a sounding stroke
    Which has so confused my wits,
That I cannot remember, and never shall,
What was the close of that festival,
    Nor how the Palace was shatter'd to bits:
For all that, just now, I think I know,
Is what is the force of an Ogre's blow,
    As my head, by starts and fits,
Aches and throbs; and, when I look round,
All that I hear is the sickening sound
  Of the nurse's watch, and the doctor's boots,
  Instead of the magical fairy flutes;
And all that I see, in my love's lost place,
Is that gin-drinking hag, with her nut-cracker face,
  By the hearth's half-burn'd out wood:

And the only stream is this stream of blood
That flows from me, red and wide:
Yet still I hear,—as sharp and clear,
In the horrible horrible silence outside,
The clock that stands in the empty hall,
And talks to my soul of the flight of time;
With a face like a face at a funeral,
Telling a tale too sad for rhyme:
And still I hear, with as little cheer,
In the yet more horrible silence inside,
Chanted, perchance, by elves and fays,
From some far island, out of my gaze,
Where a house has fallen, and some one has died,
That music, that music of other days,
With its minstrelsy undescried!

For Time, which surviveth everything,
And Memory which surviveth Time:—
These two sit by my side, and sing,
A song too sad for rhyme.

THE CANTICLE OF LOVE.

I ONCE heard an angel, by night, in the sky,
Singing softly a song to a deep golden lute:
The polestar, the seven little planets, and I,
To the song that he sung listen'd mute.
For the song that he sung was so strange and so sweet,
And so tender the tones of his lute's golden strings,
That the Seraphs of Heaven sat husht at his feet,
And folded their heads in their wings.

And the song that he sung by those Seraphs up there
Is call'd . . "Love." But the words, I had heard them elsewhere.

For, when I was last in the nethermost Hell,
On a rock 'mid the sulphurous surges, I heard
A pale spirit sing to a wild hollow shell,
And his song was the same, every word.
But so sad was his singing, all Hell to the sound
Moan'd, and, wailing, complain'd like a monster in pain,
While the fiends hover'd near o'er the dismal profound,
With their black wings weigh'd down by the strain.

And the song that was sung by the Lost Ones down there
Is call'd . . "Love." But the spirit that sung was Despair.

When the moon sets to-night, I will go down to ocean,
Bare my brow to the breeze, and my heart to its anguish;
And sing till the Siren with pining emotion
(Undroused in her sea-caves) shall languish.
And the Sylphs of the water shall crouch at my feet,
With their white wistful faces turn'd upward to hear,
And the soft Salamanders shall float, in the heat
Of the ocean volcanoes, more near.

For the song I have learn'd, all that listen shall move:
But there's one will not listen, and that one I love.

THE PEDDLER.

THERE was a man, whom you might see,
Toward nightfall, on the dusty track,
Faring, footsore and wearily—
A strong box on his back.

A speck against the flaring sky,
You saw him pass the line of dates,
The camel-drivers loitering by
From Bagdadt's dusking gates.

The merchants from Bassora stared,
And of his wares would question him,
But, without answer, on he fared
Into the evening dim.

Nor only in the east: but oft
In northern lands of ice and snow,
You might have seen, past field and croft,
That figure faring slow.

His cheek was worn; his back bent double
Beneath the iron box he bore;
And in his walk there seem'd such trouble,
You saw his feet were sore.

You wonder'd if he ever had
A settled home, a wife, a child:
You marvell'd if a face so sad
At any time had smiled.

The cheery housewife oft would fling
A pitying alms, as on he strode,
Where, round the hearth, a rosy ring,
Her children's faces glow'd:

In the dark doorway, oft the maid,
Late-lingering on her lover's arm,

Watch'd thro' the twilight, half-afraid,
That solitary form.

The traveller hail'd him oft, . . . "Good night!
The town is far: the road is lone:
God speed!" . . . already out of sight,
The wayfarer was gone.

But, when the night was late and still,
And the last star of all had crept
Into his place above the hill,
He laid him down and slept.

His head on that strong box he laid;
And there, beneath the star-cold skies,
In slumber, I have heard it said,
There rose before his eyes

A lovely dream, a vision fair,
Of some far-off, forgotten land,
And of a girl with golden hair,
And violets in her hand.

He sprang to kiss her . . . "Ah! once more
Return, beloved, and bring with thee
The glory and delight of yore,—
Lost evermore to me!"

Then, ere she answer'd, o'er his back
There fell a brisk and sudden stroke,—
So sound and resolute a thwack
That, with the blow, he woke . . . .

There comes out of that iron box
An ugly hag, an angry crone;
Her crutch about his ears she knocks:
She leaves him not alone:

"Thou lazy vagabond! come, budge,
And carry me again," . . . she says:

Not half the journey's over . . . trudge!"
. . . He groans, and he obeys.

Oft in the sea he sought to fling
That iron box. But witches swim:
And wave and wind were sure to bring
The old hag back to him;

Who all the more about his brains
Belabour'd him with such hard blows,
That the poor devil, for his pains,
Wish'd himself dead, heaven knows!

Love, is it thy hand in mine? . . . Behold!
I see the crutch uplifted high.
The angry hag prepares to scold.
Oh, yet we might . . . . . Good bye!

A GHOST STORY.

I LAY awake past midnight:
The moon set o'er the snow:
The very cocks, for coldness,
Could neither sleep nor crow.

There came to me, near morning,
A woman pale and fair:
She seem'd a monarch's daughter
By the red gold round her hair.

The ring upon her finger
Was one that well I know:
I knew her fair face also,
For I had loved it so!

But I felt I saw a spirit,
And I was sore afraid;

For it is many and many a year
Ago, since she was dead.

I would have spoken to her,
But I could not speak, for fear:
Because it was a homeless ghost
That walk'd beyond its sphere;

Till her head from her white shoulders
She lifted up: and said . . .
"*Look in! you'll find I'm hollow.*
Pray do not be afraid!"

SMALL PEOPLE.

THE warm moon was up in the sky,
And the warm summer out on the land.
There trembled a tear from her eye:
There trembled a tear on my hand.

Her sweet face I could not see clear,
For the shade was so dark in the tree:
I only felt touch'd by a tear,
And I thought that the tear was for me.

In her small ear I whisper'd a word,—
With her sweet lips she laugh'd in my face:
And, as light thro' the leaves as a bird,
She flitted away from the place.

Then she told to her sister, the Snake,
All I said; and her cousin the Toad.
The Snake slipp'd away to the brake,
The Toad went to town by the road.

The Toad told the Devil's-coach-horse,
Who cock'd up his tail at the news.

The Snake hiss'd the secret, of course,
To the Newt, who was changing her shoes.

The Newt drove away to the ball,
And told it the Scorpion and Asp.
The Spider who lives in the wall
Overheard it, and told it the Wasp.

The Wasp told the Midge and the Gnat:
And the Gnat told the Flea and the Nit.
The Nit dropp'd an egg as she sat:
The Flea shrugg'd his shoulders, and bit.

The Nit and the Flea are too small,
And the Snake slips from under my foot:
I wish I could find 'mid them all
A man,—to insult and to shoot!

METEMPSYCHOSIS.

She fann'd my life out with her soft little sighs:
She hush'd me to death with her face so fair:
I was drunk with the light of her wild blue eyes,
And strangled dumb in her long gold hair.

So now I'm a blesséd and wandering ghost,
Tho' I cannot quite find out my way up to heaven:
But I hover about o'er the long reedy coast,
In the wistful light of a low red even.

I have borrow'd the coat of a little gray gnat:
There's a small sharp song I have learn'd how to sing:
I know a green place she is sure to be at:
I shall light on her neck there, and sting, and sting.

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, life never pleased me!
I fly where I list now, and sleep at my ease.
Buzz, buzz, buzz! the dead only are free.
Yonder's my way now. Give place if you please.

TO THE QUEEN OF SERPENTS.

I TRUST that never more in this world's shade
Thine eyes will be upon me: never more
Thy face come back to me. For thou hast made
My whole life sore:

And I might curse thee, if thou camest again
To mock me with the memory in thy face
Of days I would had been not. So much pain
Hath made me base—

Enough to wreak the wrath of years of wrong
Even on so frail and weak a thing as thou!
Fare hence, and be forgotten. . . . Sing thy song,
And braid thy brow,

And be beloved, and beautiful,—and be
In beauty baleful still . . . a Serpent Queen
To others not yet curst by kissing thee,
As I have been.

But come not nigh me till my end be near,
And I have turn'd a dying face toward heaven.
Then, if thou wilt, approach,—and have no fear,
And be forgiven.

Close, if thou wilt, mine eyes, and smooth my hair.
Fond words will come upon my parting breath.
Nor, having desolated life, forbear
Kind offices to death.

BLUEBEARD.

I WAS to wed young Fatima,
As pure as April's snowdrops are,
In whose love lay hid my crooked life,
As in its sheath my scimitar.

Among the hot pomegranate boughs,
At sunset, here alone we sat.
To call back something from that hour
I'd give away my Caliphat.

She broke her song to gaze at me:
Her lips she lean'd my lips above . . .
"Why art thou silent all this while,
Lord of my life, and of my love?"

"*Silent I am, young Fatima,*
For silent is my soul in me,
And language will not help the want
Of that which cannot ever be."

"But wherefore is thy spirit sad,
My lord, my love, my life?" . . . she said.
"*Because thy face is wondrous like,*
The face of one I knew, that's dead."

"Ah cruel, cruel," cried Fatima,
"That I should not possess the past!
What woman's lips first kiss'd the lips
Where my kiss lived and linger'd last?

"And she that's dead was loved by thee,
That so her memory moves thee yet? . . .
Thy face grows cold and white, as looks
The moon o'er yonder minaret!"

" Ay, Fatima! I loved her well,
With all of love's and life's despair,
Or else I had not strangled her,
That night, in her own fatal hair."

FATIMA.

A YEAR ago thy cheek was bright,
As oleander buds that break
The dark of yonder dells by night
Above the lamp-lit lake.

Pale as a snowdrop in Cashmere
Thy face to-night, fair infant, seems.
Ah, wretched child! What dost thou hear
When I talk in my dreams?

GOING BACK AGAIN.

I DREAM'D that I walk'd in Italy
When the day was going down,
By a water that flow'd quite silently
Thro' an old dim-lighted town:

Till I came a Palace fair to see:
Wide open the windows were:
My love at a window sat, and she
Beckon'd me up the stair.

I roam'd thro' many a corridor
And many a chamber of state:
I pass'd thro' many an open door,
While the day was growing late:

Till I came to the Bridal Chamber at last,
All dim in the darkening weather.
The flowers at the window were talking fast,
And whispering all together.

The place was so still that I could hear
Every word that they said:
They were whispering under their breath with fear,
For somebody there was dead.

When I came to the little rose-colour'd room,
From the window there flew a bat.
The window was open'd upon the gloom:
My love at the window sat:

She sat with her guitar on her knee,
But she was not singing a note,
For some one had drawn (ah, who could it be?)
A knife across her throat.

THE CASTLE OF KING MACBETH.

This is the castle of King Macbeth.
And here he feasts—when the daylight wanes,
And the moon goes softly over the heath—
His Earls and Thanes.

A hundred harpers with harps of gold
Harp thorough the night high festival:
And the sound of the music they make is roll'd
From hall to hall.

They drink deep healths till the rafters rock
In the Banquet Hall; and the shout is borne
To the courts outside, where the crowing cock
Is waked ere morn.

And the castle is all in a blaze of light
From cresset, and torch, and sconce: and there
Each warrior dances all the night
With his lady fair.

They dance and sing till the raven is stirr'd
On the wicked elm-tree outside in the gloom:
And the rustle of silken robes is heard
From room to room.

But there is one room in that castle old,
In a lonely turret where no one goes,
And a dead man sits there, stark and cold,
Whom no one knows.

DEATH-IN-LIFE.

BLEST is the babe that dies within the womb.
Blest is the corpse which lies within the tomb.
And blest that death for which this life makes room.

But dreary is the tomb where the corpse lies:
And wretched is the womb where the child dies:
And curst that death which steals this life's disguise.

KING LIMOS.

THERE once was a wicked, old, gray king—
Long damn'd, as I have reason to know,
For he was buried, (and no bad thing!)
Hundreds of years ago.

His wicked old heart had grown so chill'd
That the leech, to warm him, did not shrink
To give him each night a goblet, fill'd
With a virgin's blood, to drink.

"A splenetic legend," . . . you say, of course!
Yet there may be something in it, too.
Kill, or be kill'd . . . which choice were the worse?
I know not. Solve it you.

But even the wolf must have his prey:
And even the gallows will have her food:
And a king, my friend, will have his way,
Tho' that way may lie thro' blood.

My heart is hungry, and must be fed;
My life is empty, and must be fill'd;
One is not a Ghoul, to live on the dead:
What then if fresh blood be spill'd?

We follow the way that nature leads.
What's the very first thing that we learn? . . .
To devour.
Each life the death of some other needs
To help it from hour to hour.

From the animalcule that swallows his friends,
Nothing loath, in the wave as it rolls,
To man, as we see him, this law ascends;
'Tis the same in the world of souls.

The law of the one is still to absorb:
To be absorb'd is the other's lot:—
The lesser orb by the larger orb,
The weak by the strong . . . why not?

My want's at the worst: so why should I spare
(Since just such a thing my want supplies)
This little girl with the silky hair,
And the love in her two large eyes?

THE FUGITIVE.

THERE is no quiet left in life,
Not any moment brings me rest:
For evermore, from shore to shore,
I bear about a laden breast.

I see new lands: I meet new men:
I learn strange tongues in novel places.
I cannot chase one phantom face
That haunts me spite of newer faces.

For me the wine is pour'd by night,
And deep enough to drown much sadness;
But from the cup that face looks up,
And mirth and music turn to madness.

There's many a lip that's warm for me:
Many a heart with passion bounding:
But ah, my breast, when closest prest,
Creeps to a cold step near me sounding.

To this dark pent-house of the mind
I lure the bat-wing'd Sleep in vain;
For on his wings a dream he brings
That deepens all the dark with pain.

I may write books which friends will praise,
I may win fame, I may win treasure;
But hope grows less with each success,
And pain grows more with every pleasure.

The draughts I drain to slake my thirst
But fuel more the infernal flame.
There tangs a sting in everything:—
The more I change, the more the same!

A man that flies before the pest,
From wind to wind my course is whirl'd.
This fly accurst stung Io first,
And drove her wild across the world!

THE SHORE.

CAN it be women that walk in the sea-mist, under the cliffs there?
Where, 'neath a briny bow, creaming, advances the lip
Of the foam, and out from the sand-chok'd anchors, on to the skiffs there,
The long ropes swing thro' the surge, as it tumbles; and glitter, and drip.

All the place in a lurid, glimmering, emerald glory,
Glares like a Titan world come back under heaven again:
Yonder, up there, are the steeps of the sea-kings, famous in story;
But who are they on the beach? They are neither women, nor men.

Who knows, are they the land's, or the water's, living creatures?
Born of the boiling sea? nurst in the seething storms?
With their woman's hair dishevell'd over their stern male features,
Striding, bare to the knee; magnified maritime forms!

They may be the mothers and wives, they may be the sisters and daughters

Of men on the dark mid-seas, alone in those
black-coil'd hulls,
That toil 'neath yon white cloud, whence the moon
will rise o'er the waters
To-night, with her face on fire, if the wind in
the evening lulls.

But they may be merely visions, such as only
sick men witness,
(Sitting as I sit here, fill'd with a wild regret)
Framed from the sea's misshapen spume with a
horrible fitness
To the winds in which they walk, and the surges
by which they are wet:—

Salamanders, sea-wolves, witches, warlocks; marine
monsters,
Which the dying seaman beholds, when the rats
are swimming away,
And an Indian wind 'gins hiss from an unknown
isle, and alone stirs
The broken cloud which burns on the verge of
the dead, red day.

I know not. All in my mind is confused; nor can
I dissever
The mould of the visible world from the shape
of my thoughts in me.
The Inward and Outward are fused: and, thro'
them, murmur forever
The sorrow whose sound is the wind, and the
roar of the limitless sea.

THE NORTH SEA.

By the gray sand-hills, o'er the cold sea-shore; where, dumbly peering,
Pass the pale-sail'd ships, scornfully, silently; wheeling, and veering
Swift out of sight again; while the wind searches what it finds never,
O'er the sand-reaches, bays, billows, blown beaches, —homeless forever!
And, in a vision of the bare heaven seen and soon lost again,
Over the rolling foam, out in the mid-seas, round by the coast again,
Hovers the sea-gull, poised in the wind above, o'er the bleak surges,
In the green briny gleam, briefly reveal'd and gone; . . fleet, as emerges
Out of the tumult of some brain where memory labours, and fretfully
Moans all the night-long,—a wild wingéd hope, soon fading regretfully.
Here walk the lost Gods o' dark Scandinavia, morning and even;
Faint pale divinities, realmless and sorrowful, exil'd from Heaven;
Burthen'd with memories of old theogonies; each ruin'd monarchy
Roaming amazed by seas oblivious of ancient fealty.
Never, again at the tables of Odin, in their lost Banquet Hall,
Shall they from golden cups drink, hearing golden harps, harping high festival,
Never praise bright-hair'd Freya, in Vingolf, for her lost loveliness!
Never, with Ægir, sail round cool moonlit isles of green wilderness!

Here on the lone wind, thro' the long twilight, when day is waning,
Many a hopeless voice near the night is heard coldly complaining,
Here, in the glimmering darkness, when winds are dropp'd, and not a seaman sings
From cape or foreland, pause, and pass silently, forms of discrownéd kings,
With sweeping, floating folds of dim garments; wandering in wonder
Of their own aspect; trooping towards midnight; feeling for thunder.
Here, in the afternoon; while, in her father's boat, heavily laden,
Mending the torn nets, sings up the bleak bay the Fisher-Maiden,
I too, forlornly wandering, wandering, see, with the mind's eye,
Shadows beside me, . . . (hearing the wave moan, hearing the wind sigh). .
Shadows, and images balefully beautiful, of days departed:
Sounds of faint footsteps, gleams of pale foreheads, make me sad-hearted;
Sad for the lost, irretrievable sweetness of former hours;
Sad with delirious, desolate odours, from faded flowers;
Sad for the beautiful gold hair, the exquisite, exquisite graces
Of a divine face, hopelessly unlike all other faces!

O'er the gray sand-hills, (where I sit sullenly, full of black fancies,)
Nipt by the sea-wind, drench'd by the sea-salt, little wild pansies
Flower, and freshly tremble, and twinkle; sweet sisterhoods,
Lone, and how lovely, with their frail green stems, and dark purple hoods!

Here, even here in the midst of monotonous, fixt desolation,
Nature has touches of tenderness, beauties of young variation;
Where, O my heart, in thy ruin'd, and desolate, desolate places,
Springs there a flow'ret, or gleams there the green of a single oäsis?
Hidden, it may be perchance, and I know it not ... hidden yet inviolate,
Pushes the germ of an unconscious rapture in me, like the violet
Which, on the bosom of March, the snows cover and keep till the coming
Of April, the first bee shall find, when he wanders, and welcome it humming.

Teach me, thou North where the winds lie in ambush; the rains, and foul weather
Are stored in the house of the storms; and the snow-flakes are garner'd together;
Where man's stern, dominate, sovereign intelligence holds in allegiance
Whatever blue Sirius beholds on this Earth-ball—all seas, and all regions;
The iron in the hills' heart; the spirit in the load-stone; the ice in the poles;
All powers, all dominions; ships; merchandise; armaments; beasts; human souls; ...
Teach me thy secrets: teach to refrain, to restrain, to be still;
Teach me unspoken, steadfast endurance;—the silence of Will!

A NIGHT IN THE FISHERMAN'S HUT.

PART I.

THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER.

If the wind had been blowing the Devil this way
The midnight could scarcely have grown more unholy,
Or the sea have found secrets more wicked to say
To the toothless old crags it is hiding there wholly.

I love well the darkness. I love well the sound
Of the thunder-drift, howling this way over ocean.
For 'tis tho' as in nature my spirit had found
A trouble akin to its own fierce emotion.

The hoarse night may howl herself silent for me!
When the silence comes, then comes the howling within.
I am drench'd to my knees in the surf of the sea,
And wet with the salt bitter rain to the skin.

Let it thunder and lighten! this world's ruin'd angel
Is but fool'd by desire like the frailest of men;
Both seek in hysterics life's awful evangel,
Then both settle down to life's silence again.

Well I know the wild spirits of water and air,
When the lean morrow turns up its cynical gray,
Will, baffled, revert with familiar despair
To their old listless work, in their old helpless way.

Yonder's the light in the Fisherman's hut:
  But the old wolf himself is, I know, off at sea;
And I see thro' the chinks, tho' the shutters be shut,
  By the firelight that some one is watching for me.

Three years ago, on this very same night,
  I walk'd in a ballroom of perfume and splendour
With a pearl-bedeck'd lady below the lamp-light:—
  Now I walk with the wild wind, whose breath is more tender.

Hark! the horses of ocean that crouch at my feet,
  They are moaning in impotent pain on the beach!
Lo! the storm-light, that swathes in its blue windingsheet
  That lone desert of sky, where the stars are dead, each!

Holloa, there! open, you little wild girl!
  Hush, . . . 'tis her soft little feet o'er the floor.
Stay not to tie up a single dark curl,
  But quick with the candle, and open the door.

One kiss? . . . there's twenty! . . . but first, take my coat there,
  Salt as a sea-sponge, and dripping all thro'.
The old wolf, your father, is out in the boat there.
  Hark to the thunder! . . . we're safe,—I and you.

Put on the kettle. And now for the cask
  Of that famous old rum of your father's, the king
Would have claw'd on our frontier. There, fill me the flask.
  Ah, what a quick, little, neat-handed thing!

There's my pipe. Stuff it with black negro-head.
  Soon I shall be in the cloud-land of glory.

Faith, 'tis better with you, dear, than 'fore the mast-head,
With such lights at the windows of night's upper story!

Next, over the round open hole in the shutter
You may pin up your shawl, . . . lest a mermaid should peep.
Come, now, the kettle's beginning to splutter,
And the cat recomposes herself into sleep.

Poor little naked feet, . . . put them up there . . .
Little white foam flakes! and now the soft head,
Here, on my shoulder; while all the dark hair
Falls round us like seaweed. What matter the bed

If sleep will visit it, if kisses feel there
Sweet as they feel under curtains of silk?
So, shut your eyes, while the firelight will steal there
O'er the black bearskin, the arm white as milk!

Meanwhile I'll tell to you all I remember
Of the old legend, the northern romance
I heard of in Sweden, that snowy December
I pass'd there, about the wild Lord Rosencrantz.

Then, when you're tired, take the cards from the cupboard,
Thumb'd over by every old thief in our crew,
And I'll tell you your fortune, you little Dame Hubbard;
My own has been squander'd on witches like you.

Knave, King, and Queen, all the villainous pack of 'em,
I know what they're worth in the game, and have found

Upon all the trump-cards the small mark at the back of 'em,
The Devil's nail mark, who still cheats us all round.

PART II.

THE LEGEND OF LORD ROSENCRANTZ.

THE lamps in the castle hall burn bright,
And the music sounds, and the dancers dance,
And lovely the young Queen looks to-night,
But pale is Lord Rosencrantz.

Lord Rosencrantz is always pale,
But never more deadly pale than now . . .
Oh, there is a whisper,—an ancient tale,—
A rumour, . . . but who should know?

He has stepp'd to the daïs. He has taken her hand.
And she gives it him with a tender glance.
And the hautboys sound, and the dancers stand,
And envy Lord Rosencrantz.

That jewell'd hand to his lips he prest;
And lightly he leads her towards the dance:
And the blush on the young Queen's cheek confest
Her love for Lord Rosencrantz.

The moon at the mullion'd window shone;
There a face and a hand in the moonlight glance;
But that face and that hand were seen of none,
Save only Lord Rosencrantz.

A league aloof in the forest-land
There's a dead black pool, where a man by chance

. . . . Again, again, that beckoning hand!
And it beckons Lord Rosencrantz.

While the young Queen turn'd to whisper him,
Lord Rosencrantz from the hall was gone;
And the hautboys ceased, and the lamps grew dim;
And the castle clock struck One!

* * * *

It is a bleak December night,
And the snow on the highway gleams by fits:
But the fire on the cottage-hearth burns bright,
Where the little maiden sits.

Her spinning-wheel she has laid aside;
And her blue eyes soft in the firelight glance;
As she leans with love, and she leans with pride,
On the breast of Lord Rosencrantz.

Mother's asleep, up-stairs in bed:
And the black cat, she looks wondrous wise
As she licks her paws in the firelight red,
And glares with her two green eyes:

And the little maiden is half afraid,
And closely she clings to Lord Rosencrantz;
For she has been reading, that little maid,
All day, in an old romance,

A legend wild of a wicked pool
A league aloof in the forest-land,
And a crime done there, and a sinful soul,
And an awful face and hand.

"Our little cottage is bleak and drear,"
Says the little maid to Lord Rosencrantz;
"And this is the loneliest time of the year,
And oft, when the wind, by chance,

"The ivy beats on the window-pane,
I wake to the sound in the gusty nights;
And often, outside, in the drift and rain,
There seem to pass strange sights.

"And oh, it is dreary here alone!
When mother's asleep, in bed, up-stairs,
And the black cat, there, to the forest is gone,
——Look at her, how she glares!"

"Thou little maiden, my heart's own bliss,
Have thou no fear, for I love thee well;
And sweetest it is upon nights like this,
When the wind, like the blast of hell,

"Roars up and down in the chimneys old,
And the wolf howls over the distant snow,
To kiss away both the night and the cold
With such kisses as we kiss now."

"Ah! more than life I love thee, dear!"
Says the little maiden with eyes so blue;
"And, when thou art near, I have no fear,
Whatever the night may do.

"But oh, it is dreary when thou art away!
And in bed all night I pray for thee:
Now tell me, thou dearest heart, and say,
Dost thou ever pray for me?"

"Thou little maiden, I thank thee much,
And well I would thou shouldst pray for me;
But I am a sinful man, and such
As ill should pray for thee."

Hist! . . . was it a face at the window past?
Or was it the ivy leaf, by chance,
Tapping the pane in the fitful blast,
That startled Lord Rosencrantz?

The little maid, she has seen it plain,
For she shriek'd, and down she fell in a swoon:
Mutely it came, and went again,
In the light of the winter moon.

* * * *

The young Queen,—oh! but her face was sweet!—
She died on the night that she was wed:
And they laid her out in her windingsheet,
Stark on her marriage-bed.

The little maiden, she went mad;
But her soft blue eyes still smiled the same,
With ever that wistful smile they had:
Her mother, she died of shame.

The black cat lived from house to house,
And every night to the forest hied;
And she kill'd many a rat and mouse
Before the day she died.

And do you wish that I should declare
What was the end of Lord Rosencrantz?
Ah! look in my heart, you will find it there,
——The end of the old romance!

PART III.

DAYBREAK.

YES, you have guess'd it. The wild Rosencrantz,
It is I, dear, the wicked one; who but I, maiden?
My life is a tatter'd and worn-out romance,
And my heart with the curse of the Past hath been laden:

For still, where I wander or linger, forever
Comes a skeleton hand that is beckoning for me;

And still, dogging my footsteps, life's long Never-never
Pursues me, wherever my footsteps may be:

The star of my course hath been long ago set, dear;
And the wind is my pilot, wherever he blows:
He cannot blow from me what I would forget, dear,
Nor blow to me that which I seek for,—repose.

What! if I were the Devil himself, would you cling to me,
Bear my ill humours, and share my wild nights?
Crouch by me, fear me not, stay by me, sing to me,
While the dark haunts us with sounds and with sights?

Follow me far away, pine not, but smile to me,
Never ask questions, and always be gay?
Still the dear eyes meekly turned all the while to me,
Watchful the night thro', and patient the day?

What! if this hand, that now strays thro' your tresses,
Three years ago had been dabbled in gore?
What! if this lip, that your lip now caresses,
A corpse had been pressing but three years before?

Well then, behold! . . . 'tis the gray light of morning
That breaks o'er the desolate waters . . . and hark!
'Tis the first signal shot from my boat gives me warning:
The dark moves away: and I follow the dark.

On with your hat and your cloak! You are mine, child,
Mine and the fiend's that pursues me, henceforth!

We must be far, ere day breaks, o'er the brine,
child:
It may be south I go, it may be north.

What! really fetching your hat and your cloak,
dear?
Sweet little fool. Kiss me quick now, and laugh!
All I have said to you was but a joke, dear:
Half was in folly, in wantonness half.

PART IV.

BREAKFAST.

Ay, maiden: the whole of my story to you
Was but a deception, a silly romance:
From the first to the last word, no word of it true;
And my name's Owen Meredith, not Rosencrantz.

I never was loved by a Queen, I declare:
And no little maiden for me has gone mad:
I never committed a murder, I swear;
And I probably should have been hang'd if I had.

I never have sold to the Devil my soul;
And but small is the price he would give me, I
know:
I live much as other folks live on the whole:
And the worst thing in me's my digestion . . .
heigh ho!

Let us leave to the night-wind the thoughts which
he brings,
And leave to the darkness the powers of the dark;
For my hopes o'er the sea lightly flit, like the wings
Of the curlews that hover and poise round my
bark.

Leave the wind and the water to mutter together
Their weird metaphysical grief, as of old,
For day's business begins, and the clerk of the weather
To the powers of the air doth his purpose unfold.

Be you sure those dread Titans, whatever they be,
That sport with this ball in the great courts of Time,
To play practical jokes upon you, dear, and me,
Will never desist from a sport so sublime.

The old Oligarchy of Greece, now abolish'd,
Were idle aristocrats, fond of the arts,
But tho' thus refined, all their tastes were so polish'd,
They were turbulent, dissolute gods, without hearts.

They neglected their business, they gave themselves airs,
Read the poets in Greek, sipp'd their wine, took their rest,
Never troubling their beautiful heads with affairs,
And as for their morals, the least said, the best.

The scandal grew greater and greater: and then
An appeal to the people was formally made.
The old gods were displaced by the suffrage of men,
And a popular government form'd in their stead.

But these are high matters of state—I and you
May be thankful, meanwhile, we have something to eat,
And nothing, just now, more important to do,
Than to sit down at once, and say grace before meat.

You may boil me some coffee, an egg, if it's handy;
The sea's rolling mountains just now. I shall wait
For King Neptune's *mollissima tempora fandi*,
Who will presently lift up his curly white pate,

Bid Eurus and Notus to mind their own business,
And make me a speech in Hexameters slow;
While I, by the honour elated to dizziness,
Shall yield him my offerings, and make him my bow.

A DREAM.

I HAD a quiet dream last night:
For I dream'd that I was dead;
Wrapt around in my grave-clothes white,
With my gravestone at my head.

I lay in a land I have not seen,
In a place I do not know,
And the grass was deathly deathly green
Which over my grave did grow.

The place was as still as still could be,
With a few stars in the sky,
And an ocean whose waves I could not see,
Tho' I heard them moan hard by.

There was a bird in a branch of Yew,
Building a little nest.
The stars looked far and very few,
And I lay all at rest.

There came a footstep thro' the grass,
And a feeling thro' the mould:

And a woman pale did over me pass,
With hair like snakes of gold.

She read my name upon my grave:
She read my name with a smile.
A wild moan came from a wandering wave,
But the stars smil'd all the while.

The stars smil'd soft. That woman pale
Over my grave did move,
Singing all to herself a tale
Of one that died for love.

There came a sparrow-hawk to the tree,
The little bird to slay:
There came a ship from over the sea,
To take that woman away.

The little bird I wish'd to save,
To finish his nest so sweet:
But so deep I lay within my grave
That I could not move my feet.

That woman pale I wish'd to keep
To finish the tale I heard:
But within my grave I lay so deep
That I could not speak a word.

KING SOLOMON.

King Solomon stood, in his crown of gold,
Between the pillars, before the altar
In the House of the Lord. And the King was old,
And his strength began to falter,
So that he lean'd on his ebony staff,
Seal'd with the seal of the Pentegraph.

All of the golden fretted work,
Without and within so rich and rare,
As high as the nest of the building stork,
Those pillars of cedar were:—
Wrought up to the brazen chapiters
Of the Sidonian artificers.

And the King stood still as a carven king,
The carven cedarn beams below,
In his purple robe, with his signet ring,
And his beard as white as snow,
And his face to the Oracle, where the hymn
Dies under the wing of the cherubim.

The wings fold over the Oracle,
And cover the heart and eyes of God:
The Spouse with pomegranate, lily, and bell,
Is glorious in her abode;
For with gold of Ophir, and scent of myrrh,
And purple of Tyre, The King cloth'd her.

By the soul of each slumbrous instrument
Drawn soft thro' the musical misty air,
The stream of the folk that came and went,
For worship, and praise, and prayer,
Flow'd to and fro, and up and down,
And round The King in his golden crown.

And it came to pass, as The King stood there,
And look'd on the house he had built, with pride,
That the Hand of The Lord came unaware,
And touch'd him; so that he died,
In his purple robe, with his signet ring,
And the crown wherewith they had crown'd him king.

And the stream of the folk that came and went
To worship the Lord with prayer and praise,

Went softly ever, in wonderment,
For The King stood there always;
And it was solemn and strange to behold
That dead king crown'd with a crown of gold.

For he lean'd on his ebony staff upright;
And over his shoulders the purple robe;
And his hair, and his beard, were both snow-white;
And the fear of him fill'd the globe;
So that none dared touch him, though he was dead,
He look'd so royal about the head.

And the moons were changed: and the years roll'd on:
And the new king reign'd in the old king's stead:
And men were married and buried anon:
But The King stood, stark and dead;
Leaning upright on his ebony staff;
Preserved by the sign of the Pentegraph.

And the stream of life, as it went and came,
Ever for worship and praise and prayer,
Was awed by the face, and the fear, and the fame
Of the dead king standing there;
For his hair was so white, and his eyes so cold,
That they left him alone with his crown of gold.

So King Solomon stood up, dead, in the House
Of The Lord, held there by the Pentegraph,
Until out from a pillar there ran a red mouse,
And gnaw'd thro' his ebony staff:
Then, flat on his face, The King fell down:
And they pick'd from the dust a golden crown.*

* My knowledge of the Rabbinical legend which suggested this Poem is one among the many debts I owe to my friend Robert Browning. I hope these lines may remind him of hours which his society rendered precious and delightful to me, and which are among the most pleasant memories of my life.

CORDELIA.

Tho' thou never hast sought to divine it,
Tho' to know it thou hast not a care,
Yet my heart can no longer confine it,
Tho' my lip may be blanch'd to declare
That I love thee, revere thee, adore thee,
O my dream, my desire, my despair!

Tho' in life it may never be given
To my heart to repose upon thine;
Tho' neither on earth, nor in heaven,
May the bliss I have dream'd of be mine;
Yet thou canst not forbid me, in distance,
And silence, and long lonely years,
To love thee, despite thy resistance,
And bless thee, despite of my tears.

Ah me, *could'st* thou love me! . . . Believe me,
How I hang on the tones of thy voice;
How the least sigh thou sighest can grieve me,
The least smile thou smilest rejoice:
In thy face, how I watch every shade there;
In thine eyes, how I learn every look;
How the least sign thy spirit hath made there
My heart reads, and writes in its book!

And each day of my life my love shapes me
From the mien that thou wearest, Beloved.
Thou hast not a grace that escapes me,
Nor a movement that leaves me unmoved.
I live but to see thee, to hear thee;
I count but the hours where thou art;
I ask—only ask—to be near thee,
Albeit so far from thy heart.

In my life's lonely galleries never
Will be silenced thy lightest footfall:
For it lingers, and echoes, forever
Unto Memory mourning o'er all.
All thy fair little footsteps are bright
O'er the dark troubled spirit in me,
As the tracks of some sweet water-sprite
O'er the heaving and desolate sea.
And, tho' cold and unkind be thine eyes,
Yet, unchill'd their unkindness below,
In my heart all its love for thee lies,
Like a violet cover'd by snow.

Little child! . . . were it mine to watch o'er thee,
To guide, and to guard, and to soothe;
To shape the long pathway before thee,
And all that was rugged to smooth;
To kneel at one bedside by night,
And mingle our souls in one prayer;
And, awak'd by the same morning-light,
The same daily duties to share;

Until Age with his silver dimm'd slowly
Those dear golden tresses of thine;
And Memory render'd thrice holy
The love in this poor heart of mine;

Ah, never . . . (recalling together,
By one hearth, in our life's winter time,
Our youth, with its lost summer-weather,
And our love, in its first golden prime,)
Should those loved lips have cause to record
One word of unkindness from me,
Or my heart cease to bless the least word
Of kindness once spoken by thee!

But, whatever my path, and whatever
The future may fashion for thine,
Thy life, O believe me, can never,

My belov'd, be indifferent to mine.
When far from the sight of thy beauty,
Pursuing, unaided, alone,
The path of man's difficult duty
In the land where my lot may be thrown;
When my steps move no more in the place
Where thou art: and the brief days of yore
Are forgotten: and even my face
In thy life is remember'd no more;
Yet in *my* life will live thy least feature;
I shall mourn the lost light of thine eyes;
And on earth there will yet be one nature
That must yearn after thine till it dies.

"YE SEEK JESUS OF NAZARETH WHICH WAS CRUCIFIED: HE IS RISEN: HE IS NOT HERE." MARK XVI. 6.

IF Jesus came to earth again,
And walk'd, and talk'd, in field and street,
Who would not lay his human pain
Low at those heavenly feet?

And leave the loom, and leave the lute,
And leave the volume on the shelf,
To follow Him, unquestioning, mute,
If 'twere the Lord himself?

How many a brow with care o'erworn,
How many a heart with grief o'erladen,
How many a youth with love forlorn,
How many a mourning maiden,

Would leave the baffling earthly prize
Which fails the earthly, weak endeavour,
To gaze into those holy eyes,
And drink content forever!

The mortal hope, I ask with tears
  Of Heaven, to soothe this mortal pain,—
The dream of all my darken'd years,—
  I should not cling to then.

The pride that prompts the bitter jest—
  (Sharp styptic of a bleeding heart!)
Would fail, and humbly leave confest
  The sin that brought the smart,

If I might crouch within the fold
  Of that white robe (a wounded bird)
The face that Mary saw behold,
  And hear the words she heard.

I would not ask one word of all
  That now my nature yearns to know;—
The legend of the ancient Fall;
  The source of human woe:

What hopes in other worlds may hide;
  What griefs yet unexplored in this;
How fares the spirit within the wide
  Waste tract of that abyss

Which scares the heart (since all we know
  Of life is only conscious sorrow)
Lest novel life be novel woe
  In death's undawn'd to-morrow;

I would not ask one word of this
  If I might only hide my head,
On that belovéd breast, and kiss
  The wounds where Jesus bled.

And I, where'er He went, would go,
  Nor question where the path might lead,
Enough to know that, here below,
  I walk'd with God indeed!

His sheep along the cool, the shade,
By the still watercourse He leads,
His lambs upon His breast are laid,
His hungry ones He feeds.

Safe in His bosom I should lie,
Hearing, where'er His steps might be,
Calm waters, murmuring, murmuring by,
To meet the mighty sea.

If this be thus, O Lord of mine,
In absence is Thy love forgot?
And must I, where I walk, repine
Because I see thee not?

If this be thus, if this be thus,
And our poor prayers yet reach Thee, Lord,
Since we are weak, once more to us
Reveal the Living Word!

Yet is my heart, indeed, so weak
My course alone I dare not trace?
Alas! I know my heart must break
Before I see Thy face.

I loved, with all my human soul,
A human creature, here below,
And, tho' thou bad'st thy sea to roll
Forever 'twixt us two,

And tho' her form I may not see
Thro' all my long and lonely life,
And tho' she never now may be
My helpmate and my wife,

Yet in my dreams her dear eyes shine,
Yet in my heart her face I bear,
And yet each holiest thought of mine
I seem with her to share.

But, Lord, Thy face I never saw,
  Nor ever heard Thy human voice:
My life, beneath an iron law,
  Moves on without my choice.

No memory of a happier time,
  When in Thine arms, perchance, I slept,
In some lost ante-natal clime,
  My mortal frame hath kept:

And all is dark—before—behind.
  I cannot reach Thee, where Thou art,
I cannot bring Thee to my mind,
  Nor clasp Thee to my heart.

And this is why, by night and day,
  Still with so many an unseen tear,
These lonely lips have learn'd to pray
  That God would spare me here,

While yet my doubtful course I go
  Along the vale of mortal years,
By Life's dull stream, that will not flow
  As fast as flow my tears,

One human hand, my hand to take:
  One human heart, my own to raise:
One loving human voice, to break
  The silence of my days.

Saviour, if this wild prayer be wrong,
  And what I seek I may not find,
Oh, make more hard, and stern, and strong,
  The framework of my mind!

Or, nearer to me, in the dark
  Of life's low hours, one moment stand,
And give me keener eyes to mark
  The moving of Thy hand.

TO CORDELIA.

I DO not blame thee, that my life
  Is lonelier now than even before;
For hadst thou been, indeed, my wife,
  (Vain dream that cheats no more!)

The fate, which from my earliest years
  Hath made so dark the path I tread,
Had taught thee too, perchance, such tears
  As I have learn'd to shed.

And that fix'd gloom, which souls like mine
  Are school'd to wear with stubborn pride,
Had cast too dark a shade o'er thine,—
  Hadst thou been by my side.

I blame thee not, that thou shouldst flee
  From paths where only weeds have sprung,
Tho' loss of thee is loss to me
  Of all that made youth young.

For 'tis not mine, and 'twas not thine,
  To shape our course as first we strove:
And powers which I could not combine
  Divide me from thy love.

Alas! we cannot choose our lives,—
  We can but bear the burthen given.
In vain the feverish spirit strives
  With unrelenting heaven.

For who can bid those tyrant stars
  The injustice of their laws repeal?
Why ask who makes our prison bars,
  Since they are made of steel?

The star that rules my darken'd hour
  Is fixt in reachless spheres on high:
The curse which foils my baffled power
  Is scrawl'd across the sky.

My heart knows all it felt, and feels:
  But more than this I shall not know,
Till He that made the heart reveals
  Why mine must suffer so.

I only know that, never yet,
  My life hath found what others find,—
That peace of heart which will not fret
  The fibres of the mind.

I only know that not for me
  The human love, the clasp, the kiss;
My love in other worlds must be,—
  Why was I born in this?

The bee is framed to find her food
  In every wayside flower and bell,
And build within the hollow wood
  Her own ambrosial cell:

The spider hath not learn'd her art,
  A home in ruin'd towers to spin;
But what it seeks, my heart, my heart
  Is all unskill'd to win.

The world was fill'd, ere I was born,
  With man and maid, with bower and brake,
And nothing but the barren thorn
  Remain'd for me to take:

I took the thorn, I wove it round,
  I made a piercing crown to wear:
My own sad hands myself have crown'd,
  Lord of my own despair.

That which we are, we are. 'Twere vain
To plant with toil what will not grow.
The cloud will break, and bring the rain,
Whether we reap, or sow.

I cannot turn the thunder-blast,
Nor pluck the levin's lurid root;
I cannot change the changeless past,
Nor make the ocean mute.

And if the bolt of death must fall
Where, bare of head, I walk my way,
Why let it fall! I will not call
To bid the Thunderer stay.

'Tis much to know, whate'er betide
The pilgrim path I pace alone,
Thou wilt not miss me from thy side
When its brief course is done.

Hadst thou been mine,—when skies were drear,
And waves were rough, for thy sweet sake
I should have found in all some fear
My inmost breast to shake:

But now, his fill the blast may blow,
The sea may rage, the thunder roll,
For every path by which I go
Will reach the self-same goal.

Too proud to fly, too weak to cope,
I yet will wait, nor bow my head.
Those who have nothing left to hope,
Have nothing left to dread.

A LETTER TO CORDELIA.

PERCHANCE, on earth, I shall not see thee ever
Ever again: and my unwritten years
Are sign'd out by that desolating "Never,"
And blurr'd with tears.

'Tis hard, so young—so young as I am still,
To feel for evermore from life depart
All that can flatter the poor human will,
Or fill the heart.

Yet there was nothing in that sweet, and brief,
And perisht intercourse, now closed for me,
To add one thought unto my bitterest grief
Upbraiding thee.

'Tis somewhat to have known, albeit in vain,
One woman in this sorrowful bad earth,
Whose very loss can yet bequeathe to pain
New faith in worth.

If I have overrated, in the wild
Blind heat of hope, the sense of aught which hath
From the lost vision of thy beauty smiled
On my lone path,

My retribution is, that to the last
I have o'errated, too, my power to cope
With this fierce thought . . . that life must all be past
Without life's hope;

And I would bless the chance which let me see
Once more the comfort of thy face, altho'
It were with beauty never born for me
That face should glow.

To see thee—all thou wilt be—loved and loving—
Even tho' another's—in the years to come—
To watch, once more, thy gracious sweetness moving
Thro' its pure home,—

Even this would seem less desolate, less drear,
Than never, never to behold thee more—
Never on those belovéd lips to hear
The voice of yore!

These weak words, O my friend, fell not more fast
Than the weak scalding tears that with them fell.
Nor tears, nor words came, when I saw thee last . . .
Enough! . . . Farewell.

Farewell. If that dread Power which fashion'd man
To till this planet, free to search and find
The secret of his source as best he can,
In his own mind,

Hath any care, apart from that which moves
Earth's myriads thro' Time's ages as they roll,
For any single human life, or loves
One separate soul,

May He, whose wisdom portions out for me
The moonless, changeless midnight of the heart,
Still all his softest sunshine save for thee,
Where'er thou art:

And if, indeed, not any human eyes
From human tears be free,—may Sorrow bring
Only to thee her April-rain, whose sighs
Soothe flowers in Spring.

FAILURE.

I HAVE seen those that wore Heaven's armour worsted:
I have heard Truth lie:
Seen Life, beside the founts for which it thirsted,
Curse God and die:

I have felt the hand, whose touch was rapture, braiding
Among my hair
Love's choicest flowrets, and have found how fading
Those garlands were:

I have watch'd my first and holiest hopes depart,
One after one:
I have held the hand of Death upon my heart,
And made no moan:

I have seen her whom life's whole sacrifice
Was made to keep,
Pass coldly by me with a stranger's eyes,
Yet did not weep:

Now even my body fails me; and my brow
Aches night and day:
I am weak with over-work: how can I now
Go forth and play?

What! now that Youth's forgotten aspirations
Are all no more,
Rest there, indeed, all Youth's glad recreations,
—An untried store?

Alas, what skills this heart of sad experience,
This frame o'erwrought,
This memory with life's motion all at variance,
This aching thought?

How shall I come, with these, to follow pleasure
Where others find it?
Will not their sad steps mar the merriest measure,
Or lag behind it?

Still must the man move sadlier for the dreams
That mock'd the boy;
And, having fail'd to achieve, must still, it seems,
Fail to enjoy.

It is no common failure, to have fail'd
Where man hath given
A whole life's effort to the task assail'd—
Spent earth on heaven.

If error and if failure enter here,
What helps repentance?
Remember this, O Lord, in thy severe
Last sentence!

MISANTHROPOS.

Παντα κονις καὶ παντα γελως καὶ παντα το μηδεν.

Day's last light is dying out.
All the place grows dim and drear.
See! the grisly bat's about.
There is nothing left to fear:
Little left to doubt.

Not a note of music flits
O'er the slacken'd harpstrings yonder
From the skeleton that sits
By the broken harp, to ponder
(While the spider knits

Webs in each black socket-hole)
  Where is all the music fled.
Music, hath it, then, a goal? . . .
  Broken harp, and brainless head!
Silent song and soul!

Not a light in yonder sky,
  Save that single wicked star,
Leering with its wanton eye
  Thro' the shatter'd window-bar;
Come to see me die!

All, save this, the monstrous night
  Hath erased and blotted bare
As the Fool's brain . . . God's last light
  Winking at the Fiend's work there—
Wrong made worse by right!

Gone the voice, the face, of yore!
  Gone the dream of golden hair!
Gone the garb that Falsehood wore!
  Gone the shame of being bare!
We may close the door.

All the guests are slunk away.
  Not a footstep on the stairs!
Not a friend here, left to say
  "*Amen*" to a sinner's prayers,
If he cared to pray!

Gone is Friendship's friendliness,
  After Love's fidelity:
Gone is Honour in the mess,
  Spat upon by Charity:
Faith has fled Distress.

Those grim tipstaves at the gate
  Freely may their work begin.
Let them in! they shall not wait.

There is little now within
Left for Scorn and Hate.

Oh, no doubt the air is foul!
'Tis the last lamp spits and stinks,
Shuddering downward in the bowl
Of the socket, from the brinks.
What's a burn'd-out soul?

Let them all go, unreproved!
For the source of tears is dried.
What!... One rests?... hath nothing moved
That pale woman from my side,
Whom I never loved?

You, with those dim eyes of yours,
Sadder than all eyes save mine!
That dim forehead which immures
Such faint helpless griefs, that pine
For such hopeless cures!

Must you love me, spite of loathing?
Can't you leave me where I'm lying?
Oh,... you wait for our betrothing?
I escape you, tho'—by dying!
Lay out my death-clothing.

Well I would that your white face
Were abolisht out of sight,
With the glory and the grace
Swallow'd long ago in night—
Gone—without a trace!

Reach me down my golden harp.
Set it here, beside my knee.
Never fear that I shall warp
All the chords of ecstasy,
Striking them too sharp!

Crown me with my crown of flowers.
Faded roses every one!
Pluckt in those long-perisht bowers,
By the nightshade overrun—
Fit for brows like ours!

Fill me, now, my golden cup.
Pour the black wine to the brim!
Till within me, while I sup,
All the fires, long quench'd and dim,
Flare, one moment, up.

I will sing you a last song.
I will pledge you a last health . . .
Here's to Weakness seeming strong!
Here's to Want that follows Wealth!
Here's to Right gone wrong!

Curse me now the Oppressor's rod,
And the meanness of the weak;
And the fool that apes the nod;
And the world at hide and seek
With the wrath of God.

Dreams of man's unvalued good,
By mankind's unholy means!
Curse the people in their mud!
And the wicked Kings and Queens,
Lying by the Rood.

Fill! to every plague . . . and first,
Love, that breeds its own decay;
Rotten, ere the blossom burst.
Next, the friend that slinks away,
When you need him worst.

O the world's inhuman ways!
And the heartless social lie!

And the coward, cheapening praise !
  And the patience of the sky,
Lighting such bad days !

Curséd be the heritage
  Of the sins we have not sinn'd !
Curséd be this boasting age,
  And the blind that lead the blind
O'er its creaking stage !

O the vice within the blood,
  And the sin within the sense !
And the fallen angelhood,
  With its yearnings, too immense
To be understood !

Curse the hound with beaten hide,
  When he turns and licks the hand !
Curse this woman at my side !
  And the memory of the land
Where my first love died.

Curséd be the next and most,
  (With whatever curse most kills)
Me. . . . the man whose soul is lost ;
  Foul'd by each of all these ills—
Fill'd with death and dust !

Take away the harp of gold,
  And the empty wine-cup too.
Lay me out : for I grow cold.
  There is something dim in view,
Which must pass untold :—

Something dim, and something vast—
  Out of reach of all I say.
Language ceases . . . husht, aghast.
  What am I, to curse or pray ?
God succeeds at last !

BOOK VI.

PALINGENESIS.

A PRAYER.

My Saviour, dare I come to Thee,
Who let the little children come?
But I? . . . my soul is faint in me!
I come from wandering to and fro
This weary world. There still his round
The Accuser goes: but Thee I found
Not anywhere. Both joy and woe
Have pass'd me by. I am too weak
To grieve or smile. And yet I know
That tears lie deep in all I do.
The homeless that are sick for home
Are not so wretched. Ere it break,
Receive my heart; and for the sake,
Not of my sorrows, but of Thine,
Bend down Thy holy eyes on mine,
Which are too full of misery
To see Thee clearly, tho' they seek.
Yet, if I heard Thy voice say . . . "Come,"
So might I, dying, die near Thee.
It shames me not, to have pass'd by
The temple-doors in every street
Where men profaned Thee: but that I
Have left neglected, choked with weeds,
Defrauded of its incense sweet

From holy thoughts and loyal deeds,
The fame Thou gavest me to inshrine
Thee in this wretched heart of mine.
The Satyr there hath enter'd in;
The Owl that loves the darken'd hour;
And obscene shapes of night and sin
Still haunt, where God design'd a bower
For angels.
Yet I will not say
How oft I have aspired in vain,
How toil'd along the rugged way,
And held my faith above my pain,
For this Thou knowest. Thou knowest when
I falter'd, and when I was strong;
And how from that of other men
My fate was different: all the wrong
Which devastated hope in me:
The ravaged years; the excited heart,
That found in pain its only part
Of love: the master misery
That shatter'd all my early years,
From which, in vain, I sought to flee:
Thou knowest the long repentant tears,
Thou heard'st me cry against the spheres,
So sharp my anguish seem'd to be!
All this Thou knowest. Tho' I should keep
Silence, Thou knowest my hands were free
From sin, when all things cried to me
To sin. Thou knowest that, had I roll'd
My soul in hell-flame fifty-fold,
My sorrow could not be more deep.
Lord! there is nothing hid from Thee.

EUTHANASIA.

(WRITTEN AFTER A SEVERE ILLNESS.)

SPRING to the world, and strength to me, returns;
And flowers return,—but not the flowers I knew.
I live: the fire of life within me burns;
But all my life is dead. The land I view
I know not; nor the life which I regain.
Within the hollow of the hand of death
I have lain so long, that now I draw the breath
Of life as unfamiliar, and with pain.

Of life: but not the life which is no more;—
That tender, tearful, warm, and passionate thing;
That wayward, restless, wistful life of yore;
Which now lies, cold, beneath the clasp of Spring,
As last year's leaves: but such a life as seems
A strange new-comer, coy and all-afraid.
No motion heaves the heart where it is laid,
Save when the past returns to me in dreams.

In dreams, like memories of another world:
The beauty, and the passion, and the pain
The wizardry by which my youth was whirl'd!
Round vain desires,—so violent, yet so vain!
The love which desolated life, yet made
So dear its desolation: and the creeds
Which, one by one, snapp'd in my hold like reeds,
Beneath the weight of need upon them laid!

For each man deems his own sand-house secure
While life's wild waves are lull'd; yet who can say,

If yet his faith's foundations do endure,
It is not that no wind hath blown that way?
Must we, even for their beauty's sake, keep furl'd
Our fairest creeds, lest earth should sully them,
And take what ruder help chance sends, to stem
The rubs and wrenchings of this boisterous world?

Alas! 'tis not the creed that saves the man:
It is the man that justifies the creed:
And each must save his own soul as he can,
Since each is burthen'd with a different need.
Round each the bandit passions lurk; and, fast
And furious, swarm to strip the pilgrim bare;
Then, oft, in lonely places unaware,
Fall on him, and do murder him at last.

And oft the light of truth, which thro' the dark
We fetch'd such toilful compass to detect,
Glares thro' the broken cloud on the lost bark,
And shows the rock—too late, when all is wreck'd!
Not from one watch-tower o'er the deep, alone,
It streams, but lightens there and lightens here
With lights so numberless (like heaven's eighth sphere)
That all their myriad splendours seem but one.

Time was, when it seem'd possible to be
(Then, when this shatter'd prow first felt the foam).
Columbus to some far Philosophy,
And bring, perchance, the golden Indies home.
O siren isles of the enchanted main
Thro' which I linger'd! altars, temples, groves,
Whelm'd in the salt sea wave, that rolls and roves
Around each desolated lost domain!

Over all these hath pass'd the deluge. And,
Saved from the sea, forlornly face to face

With the gaunt ruin of a world, I stand.
But two alone of all that perisht race
Survive to share with me my wanderings;
Doubt and Experience. These my steps attend,
Ever; and oft above my harp they bend,
And, weeping with me, weep among its strings.

Yet,—saved, tho' in a land unconsecrate
By any memory, it seems good to me
To build an altar to the Lord; and wait
Some token, either from the land or sea,
To point me to my rest, which should be near.
Rude is the work, and simple is my skill;
Yet, if the hand could answer to the will,
This pile should lack not incense. Father, hear

My cry unto thee. Make thy covenant
Fast with my spirit. Bind within Thy bow
The whole horizon of my tears. I pant
For Thy refreshing. Bid Thy fountains flow
In this dry desert, where no springs I see.
Before I venture in an unknown land,
Here will I clear the ground on which I stand,
And justify the hope Thou gavest me.

I cannot make quite clear what comes and goes
In fitful light, by waning gleams descried.
The Spirit, blowing where it listeth, blows
Only at times, some single fold aside
Of that great veil which hangs o'er the Unknown.
Yet do the feeble, fleeting lights that fall,
Reveal enough, in part, for hope in all:
And that seems surest which the least is shown.

God is a spirit. It is also said
Man is a spirit. Can I therefore deem
The two in nature separate? The made
Hath in it of the Maker. Hence I seem
A step towards light;—since 'tis the property

Of spirit to possess itself in all
It is possest by;—halv'd yet integral;
One person, various personality.

To say the Infinite is that which lies
Beyond the Finite, . . . were it not to set
A border mark to the immensities?
Far as these mortal senses measure yet
Their little region of the mighty plan,
Thro' valves of birth and death—are heard forever
The finite steps of infinite endeavour
Moving thro' Nature and the mind of man.

If man,—the finite spirit,—in infinity
Alone can find the truth of his ideal,
Dare I not deem that infinite Divinity
Within the finite must assume the real?
For what so feverish fancy, reckless hurl'd
Thro' a ruin'd brain, did ever yet descry
A symbol sad enough to signify
The conscious God of an unconscious world?

Wherefore, thus much perceived, to recognize
In God, the infinite spirit of Unity,
In man, the finite spirit, here implies
An interchanged perception;—Deity
Within humanity made manifest:
Not here man lonely, there a lonely God;
But, in all paths by human nature trod,
Infinity in Finity exprest.

This interchange, upon man's part, I call
Religion: revelation on the part
Of Deity: wherefrom there seems to fall
Tis consequence (the point from which I start)
If God and man be one (a unity
Of which religion is the human side)
This must in man's religion be descried,
A consciousness and a reality.

Whilst man in nature dwells, his God is still
In nature; thence, in time, there intervenes
The Law: he learns to fortify his will
Against his passions, by external means:
And God becomes the Lawgiver: but when
Corruption in the natural state we see,
And in the legal hopeless tyranny,
We seem to need (if needed not till then)

That which doth uplift nature, and yet makes
More light the heavy letter of the law.
Then for the Perfect the Imperfect aches,
Till love is born upon the deeps of awe.
Yet what of this, . . . that God in man may be,
And man, tho' mortal, of a race divine,
If no assurance lives which may incline
The heart of man to man's divinity?

"There is no God" . . . the Fool saith—to his *heart*,
Yet shapes a godhead from his *intellect*.
Is mind than heart less human, . . . that we part
Thought from affection, and from mind erect
A deity merely intellectual?
If God there be, devoid of sympathy
For man, he is not man's divinity.
A God unloving were no God at all.

This felt, . . . I ask not . . . "What is God?" but
"What
Are my relations with Him?" This alone
Concerns me now: since, if I know this not,
Tho' I should know the sources of the sun,
Or what within the hot heart of the earth
Lulls the soft spirit of the fire, altho'
The mandate of the thunder I should know,
To me my knowledge would be nothing worth.

What message, or what messenger to man?
Whereby shall revelation reach the soul?

For who, by searching, finds out God? How can
My utmost steps, unguided, gain the goal
Of necessary knowledge? It is clear
I cannot reach the gates of heaven, and knock
And enter: tho' I stood upon the rock
Like Moses, God must speak ere I can hear,

And touch me ere I feel him. He must come
To me (I cannot join Him in the cloud)
Stand at the dim doors of my mortal home;
Lift the low latch of life; and enter, bow'd
Unto this earthly roof; and sit within
The circle of the senses; at the hearth
Of the affections; be my guest on earth,
Loving my love, and sorrowing in my sin.

Since, tho' I stripp'd Divinity, in thought,
From passion, which is personality,
My God would still be human: tho' I sought
In the bird's wing or in the insect's eye,
Rather than in this broken heart of mine,
His presence, human still: human would be
All human thought conceives. Humanity,
Being less human, is not more divine.

The soul, then, cannot stipulate or refuse
The fashion of the heavenly embassy.
Since God is here the speaker, He must choose
The words He wills. Already I descry
That God and man are one, divided here,
Yet reconcilable. One doubt survives.
There is a dread condition to men's lives:
We die: and, from it's death, it would appear

Our nature is not one with the divine.
Not so. The Man-God dies; and by his death
Doth with his own immortal life combine
The spirit pining in this mortal breath.

Who from himself himself did alienate
That he, returning to himself, might pave
A pathway hence, to heaven from the grave,
For man to follow—thro' the heavenly gate.

Wert thou, my Christ, not ignorant of grief?
A man of sorrows? Not for sorrow's sake
(Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief!)
Beneath the thorns did thy pure forehead ache:
But that in sorrow only, unto sorrow,
Can comfort come; in manhood only, man
Perceive man's destiny. In Nature's plan
Our path is over Midnight to To-morrow.

And so the Prince of Life, in dying, gave
Undying life to mortals. Once he stood
Among his fellows, on this side the grave,
A man, perceptible to flesh and blood:
Now, taken from our sight, he dwells no less
Within our mortal memory and thought,
The mystery of all he was, and wrought,
Is made a part of general consciousness.

And in this consciousness I reach repose.
Spent with the howling main and desert sand:
Almost too faint to pluck the unfading rose
Of peace, that bows its beauty to my hand.
Here Reason fails, and leaves me; my pale guide
Across the wilderness—by a stern command,
Shut out, like Moses, from the Promist Land.
Touching its own achievement, it hath died.

Ah yet! I have but wrung the victory
From Thought! Not passionless will be my path.
Yet on my life's pale forehead I can see
The flush of squander'd fires. Passion hath

Yet, in the purpose of my days its place.
But changed in aspect: turn'd unto the East,
Whence grows the dayspring from on high, at least
A finer fervour trembles on its face.

THE SOUL'S SCIENCE.

CAN History prove the truth which hath
Its record in the silent soul?
Or Mathematics mete the path
Whereby the spirit seeks its goal?

Can Love of aught but Love inherit
The blessing which is born of Love?
The spirit knoweth of the spirit:
The soul alone the soul can prove.

The eye to see: the ear to hear:
The working hand to help the will:
To every sense his separate sphere:
And unto each his several skill.

The ear to sight, the eye to sound,
Is callous: unto each is given
His lorddom in his proper bound.
The soul, the soul to find out heaven!

There is a glory veil'd to sight;
A voice which never ear hath heard;
There is a law no hand can write,
Yet stronger than the written word.

And hast thou tidings for my soul
O teacher? to my soul intrust
Alone the purport of thy scroll:
Or vex me not with learnéd dust.

A PSALM OF CONFESSION.

FULL soon doth Sorrow make her covenant
With Life; and leave her shadow in the door:
And all those future days, for which we pant,
Do come in mourning for the days of yore.
Still thro' the world gleams Memory seeking Love,
Pale as the torch which grieving Ceres bore,
Seeking Proserpina, on that dark shore
Where only phantoms thro' the twilight move.

The more we change, the more is all the same,
Our last grief was a tale of other years
Quite outworn, till to our own hearts it came.
Wishes are pilgrims to the Vale of Tears.
Our brightest joys are but as airy shapes
Of cloud, that fade on evening's glimmering slope;
And disappointment hawks the hovering hope
Forever pecking at the painted grapes.

Why can we not one moment pause, and cherish
Love, tho' love turn to tears? or for hope's sake
Bless hope, albeit the thing we hope may perish?
For happiness is not in what we take,
But what we give. What matter tho' the thing
We cling to most should fail us? Dust to dust!
It is the *feeling* for the thing—the trust
In beauty somewhere, to which souls should cling.

My youth has fail'd, if failure lies in aught
The warm heart dreams, or which the working hand
Is set to do. I have fail'd in aidless thought,
And steadfast purpose, and in self command.
I have fail'd in hope, in health, in love: fail'd in the word,

And in the deed too I have fail'd. Ah yet,
Albeit with eyes from recent weepings wet,
Sing thou, my Soul, thy psalm unto The Lord!

The burthen of the desert and the sea!
The burthen of the vision in the vale!
My threshing-floor, my threshing-floor! ah, me,
Thy wind hath strewn my corn, and spoil'd the flail!
The burthen of Dumah and of Dedanim!
What of the night, O watchman, of the night?
The glory of Kedar faileth: and the might
Of mighty men is minishéd and dim.

The morning cometh, and the night, he cries.
The watchman cries the morning, too, is nigher.
And, if ye would inquire, lift up your eyes,
Inquire of the Lord, return, inquire!
I stand upon the watchtower all day long:
And all the night long I am set in ward.
Is it thy feet upon the mountains, Lord?
I sing against the darkness: hear my song!

The majesty of Kedar hath been spoil'd:
Bound are the arrows: broken is the bow.
I come before the Lord with garments soil'd.
The ashes of my life are on my brow.
Take thou thy harp, and go about the city,
O daughter of Desire, with garments torn;
Sing many songs, make melody, and mourn
That thou may'st be remember'd unto pity.

Just, awful God! here at thy feet I lay
My life's most precious offering: dearly bought,
Thou knowest with what toil by night and day:
Thou knowest the pain, the passion, and the thought.
I bring thee my youth's failure. I have spent
My youth upon it. All I have is here.

Were it worth all it is not, price more dear
Could I have paid for its accomplishment?

Yet is it much. If I could say to thee
"Acquit me, Judge; for I am thus, and thus;
And have achieved—even so much." Should I be
Thus wholly fearless and impetuous
To rush into thy presence? I might weigh
The little done against the undone much:
My merit with thy mercy: and, as such,
Haggle with pardon for a price to pay.

But now the fulness of its failure makes
My spirit fearless; and despair grows bold.
My brow, beneath its sad self-knowledge aches.
Life's presence passes Thine a thousand fold
In contemplated terror. Can I lose
Aught by that desperate temerity
Which leaves no choice but to surrender Thee
My life without condition? Could I choose

A stipulated sentence, I might ask
For ceded dalliance to some cherisht vice:
Or half-remission of some desperate task:
Now, all I have is hateful. What is the price?
Speak, Lord! I hear the Fiend's hand at the door.
Hell's slavery or heaven's service is it the choice?
How can I palter with the terms? O voice
Whence do I hear thee . . . "Go: and sin no more"?

No more, no more? But I have kist dead white
The cheek of Vice. No more the harlot hides
Her loathsomeness of lineament from my sight.
No more within my bosom there abides
Her poison'd perfume. Oh, the witch's mice
Have eat her scarlet robe and diaper,
And she fares naked! Part from her—from her?
Is this the price, O Lord, is this the price?

Yet, tho' her web be broken, bonds, I know,
Slow custom frames in the strong forge of time,
Which outlast love, and will not wear with woe,
Nor break beneath the cognizance of crime.
The witch goes bare. But he,—the father fiend,
That roams the unthrifty furrows of my days,
Yet walks the field of life; and, where he strays,
The husbandry of heaven for hell is glean'd.

Lulls are there in man's life which are not peace.
Tumults which are not triumphs. Do I take
The pause of passion for the fiend's decease?
This frost of grief hath numb'd the drowsing snake;
Which yet may wake, and sting me in the heat
Of new emotions. What shall bar the door
Against the old familiar, that of yore
Came without call, and sat within my seat?

When evening brings its dim grim hour again,
And hell lets loose its dusky brood awhile,
Shall I not find him in the darkness then?
The same subservient and yet insolent smile?
The same indifferent ignominious face?
The same old sense of household horror, come
Like a tame creature, back into its home?
Meeting me, haply, in my wonted place,

With the loath'd freedom of an unloved mate,
Or crouching on my pillow as of old?
Knowing I hate him, impotent in hate!
Therefore more subtle, strenuous, and bold.
Thus ancient habit will usurp young will,
And each new effort rivet the old thrall.
No matter! those who climb must count to fall,
But each new fall will prove them climbing still.

O wretched man! the body of this death
Which, groaning in the spirit, I yet bear

On to the end (so that I breathe the breath
Of its corruption, even tho' breathing prayer)
What shall take from me? Must I drag forever
The cold corpse of the life which I have kill'd
But cannot bury? Must my heart be fill'd
With the dry dust of every dead endeavour?

For often, at the mid of the long night,
Some devil enters into the dead clay,
And gives it life unnatural in my sight.
The dead man rises up; and roams away,
Back to the moulder'd mansions of the Past:
And lights a lurid revel in the halls
Of vacant years; and lifts his voice, and calls,
Till troops of phantoms gather round him fast.

Frail gold-hair'd corpses, in whose eyes there lives
A strange regret too wild to let them rest:
Crowds of pale maidens, who were never wives;
And infants that all died upon the breast
That suckled them. And these make revelry
Mingled with wailing all the midnight thro',
Till the sad day doth with stern light renew
The toiling land, and the complaining sea.

Full well I know that in this world of ours
The dreadful Commonplace succeeds all change.
We catch at times a gleam of flying powers
That pass in storm some windy mountain range:
But, while we gaze, the cloud returns o'er all.
And each, to guide him up the devious height,
Must take, and bless, whatever earthly light
From household hearths, or shepherd fires, may fall.

This wave, that groans and writhes upon the beach,
To-morrow will submit itself to calm;
That wind that rushes, moaning, out of reach,
Will die anon beneath some breathless palm;

These tears, these sighs, these motions of the soul,
This inexpressible pining of the mind,
The stern indifferent laws of life shall bind,
And fix forever in their old control.

Behold this half-tamed universe of things!
That cannot break, nor wholly bear, its chain.
Its heart by fits grows wild: it leaps, it springs;
Then the chain galls, and kennels it again.
If man were formed with all his faculties
For sorrow, I should sorrow for him less.
Considering a life so brief, the stress
Of its short passion I might well despise.

But all man's faculties are for delight;
But all man's life is compass'd with what seems
Framed for enjoyment: but from all that sight
And sense reveal a magic murmur streams
Into man's heart, which says, or seems to say,
"Be happy!" . . . and the heart of man replies
"Leave happiness to brutes: I would be wise:
Give me, not peace, but science, glory, art."

Therefore, age, sickness, and mortality
Are but the lightest portion of his pain:
Therefore, shut out from joy, incessantly
Death finds him toiling at a task that's vain.
I weep the want of all he pines to have:
I weep the loss of all he leaves behind:—
Contentment, and repose, and peace of mind,
Pawn'd for the purchase of a little grave:

I weep the hundred centuries of time;
I weep the millions that have squander'd them
In error, doubt, anxiety, and crime,
Here, where the free birds sing from leaf and stem:
I weep . . . but what are tears? What I deplore
I knew not, half a hundred years ago:

And half a hundred years from hence, I know
That what I weep for I shall know no more.

The spirit of that wide and leafless wind
That wanders o'er the uncompanion'd sea,
Searching for what it never seems to find,
Stirr'd in my hair, and moved my heart in me.
To follow it, far over land and main :
And everywhere over this earth's scarr'd face
The footsteps of a God I seem'd to trace ;
But everywhere steps of a God in pain.

If, haply, he that made this heart of mine,
Himself in sorrow walk'd the world erewhile,
What then am I, to marvel or repine
That I go mourning ever in the smile
Of universal nature, searching ever
The phantom of a joy which here I miss ?
My heart inhabits other worlds than this,
Therefore my search is here a vain endeavour.

Methought, . . . (it was the midnight of my soul,
Dead midnight) that I stood on Calvary :
I found the cross, but not the Christ. The whole
Of heaven was dark : and I went bitterly
Weeping, because I found him not. Methought, . . .
(It was the twilight of the dawn and mist)
I stood before the sepulchre of Christ :
The sepulchre was vacant, void of aught

Saving the cere-clothes of the grave, which were
Upfolden straight and empty : bitterly
Weeping I stood, because not even there
I found him. Then a voice spake unto me,
"Whom seekest thou? Why is thy heart dismay'd ?
Jesus of Nazareth, he is not here :
Behold, the Lord is risen. Be of cheer :
Approach, behold the place where he was laid."

And while he spake, the sunrise smote the world.
"Go forth, and tell thy brethren," spake the voice;
"The Lord is risen." Suddenly unfurl'd,
The whole unclouded Orient did rejoice
In glory. Wherefore should I mourn that here
My heart feels vacant of what most it needs?
Christ is arisen! . . . the cere-clothes and the weeds
That wrapp'd him lying in this sepulchre

Of earth, he hath abandon'd; being gone
Back into heaven, where we too must turn
Our gaze to find him. Pour, O risen Sun
Of Righteousness, the light for which I yearn
Upon the darkness of this mortal hour,
This tract of night in which I walk forlorn:
Behold the night is now far spent. The morn
Breaks, breaking from afar thro' a night shower.

REQUIESCAT.

I SOUGHT to build a deathless monument
To my dead love. Therein I meant to place
All precious things, and rare: as Nature blent
All single sweetnesses in one sweet face.
I could not build it worthy her mute merit,
Nor worthy her white brows and holy eyes,
Nor worthy of her perfect and pure spirit,
Nor of my own immortal memories.
But, as some rapt artificer of old,
To enshrine the ashes of a virgin saint,
Might scheme to work with ivory, and fine gold,
And carven gems, and legended and quaint
Seraphic heraldries; searching far lands,
Orient and occident, for all things rare,

To consecrate the toil of reverent hands,
And make his labour, like her virtue, fair;
Knowing no beauty beautiful as she,
And all his labour void, but to beguile
A sacred sorrow; so I work'd. Ah, see
Here are the fragments of my shatter'd pile!
I keep them, and the flowers that sprang between
Their broken workmanship—the flowers and weeds!
Sleep soft among the violets, O my Queen—
Lie calm among my ruin'd thoughts and deeds.

EPILOGUE.

PART I.

CHANGE without term, and strife without result,
Persons that pass, and shadows that remain,
One strange, impenetrable, and occult
Suggestion of a hope, that's hoped in vain,
Behold the world man reigns in! His delight
Deceives; his power fatigues; his strength is brief;
Even his religion presupposes grief,
His morning is not certain of the night.

I have beheld, without regret, the trunk,
Which propp'd three hundred summers on its boughs,
Which housed, of old, the merry bird, and drunk
The divine dews of air, and gave carouse
To the free winds of heaven, lie overthrown
Amidst the trees which its own fruitage bore.
Its promise is fulfill'd. It is no more,
But it hath been. Its destiny is done.

But the wild ash, that springs above the marsh!
Strong, and superb, it rises o'er the wild.
Vain energy of being! For the harsh
And fetid ooze already hath defiled
The roots whose sap it lives by. Heaven doth give
No blessing to its boughs. The humid wind
Rots them. The vapours warp them. All declined,
Its life hath ceased, ere it hath ceased to live.

Child of the waste, and nursling of the pest!
A kindred fate hath watch'd, and wept, thine own.
Thine epitaph is written in my breast.
Years change. Day treads out day. For me alone
No change is nurst within the brooding bud.
Satiety I have not known, and yet
I wither in the void of life, and fret
A futile time, with an unpeaceful blood.

The days are all too long, the nights too fair,
And too much redness satiates the rose.
O blissful season! blest and balmy air!
Waves! moonlight! silence! years of lost repose!
Bowers, and shades, that echoed to the tread
Of young Romance! birds that, from woodland bars,
Sang, serenading forth the timid stars!
Youth! beauty! passion! whither are ye fled?

I wait, and long have waited, and yet wait
The coming of the footsteps which ye told
My heart to watch for. Yet the hour is late,
And ye have left me. Did they lie, of old,
Your thousand voices prophesying bliss?
That troubled all the current of a fate
Which else might have been peaceful! I await
The thing I have not found, yet would not miss.

To face out childhood, and grow up to man,
To make a noise, and question all one sees,
The astral orbit of a world to span,
And, after a few days, to take one's ease
Under the graveyard grasses,—this, my friend,
Appears to me a thing too strange but what
I wish to know its meaning. I would not
Depart before I have perceived the end.

And I would know what, here below the sun,
He is, and what his place, that being which seems
The end of all means, yet the means of none;
Who searches, and combines, aspires, and dreams;
Seeking new things with ever the same hope,
Seeking new hopes in ever the same thing;
A king without the powers of a king,
A beggar with a kingdom in his scope;

Who only sees in what he hath attain'd
The means whereby he may attain to more;
Who only finds in that which he hath gain'd
The want of what he did not want before;
Whom weakness strengthens; who is soothed by strife;
Who seeks new joys to prize the absent most;
Still from illusion to illusion tost,
Himself the great illusion of his life!

Why is it, all deep emotion makes us sigh
To quit this world? What better thing than death
Can follow after rapture? "Let us die!"
This is the last wish on the lover's breath.
If thou wouldst live, content thee. To enjoy
Is to begin to perish. What is bliss,
But transit to some other state from this?
That, which we live for, must our life destroy.

Hast thou not ever long'd for death? If not,
Not yet thy life's experience is attain'd.
But if thy days be favour'd, if thy lot
Be easy, if hope's summit thou hast gain'd,
Die! Death is the sole future left to thee.
The knowledge of this life is bound, for each,
By his own powers. Death lies between our reach
And all which, living, we have lived to be.

Death is no evil, since it comes to all.
For evil is the exception, not the law.
What is it in the tempest that doth call
Our spirits down its pathways? or the awe
Of that abyss and solitude beneath
High mountain passes, which doth aye attract
Such strange desire? or in the cataract?
The sea? It is the sentiment of death.

If life no more than a mere seeming be,
Away with the imposture! If it tend
To nothing, and to have lived seemingly
Prove to be vain and futile in the end,
Then let us die, that we may really live,
Or cease to feign to live. Let us possess
Lasting delight, or lasting quietness.
What life desires, death, only death, can give.

Where are the violets of vanisht years?
The sunsets Rachel watch'd by Laban's well?
Where is Fidele's face? where Juliet's tears?
There comes no answer. There is none to tell
What we go questioning, till our mouths are stopt
By a clod of earth. Ask of the plangent sea,
The wild wind wailing thro' the leafless tree,
Ask of the meteor from the midnight dropt!

Come, Death, and bring the beauty back to all!
I do not seek thee, but I will not shun.

And let thy coming be at even-fall,
  Thy pathway thro' the setting of the sun.
And let us go together, I with thee,
  What time the lamps in Eden bowers are lit,
  And Melancholy, all alone, doth sit
By the wide marge of some neglected sea.

PART II.

One hour of English twilight once again!
  Lo! in the rosy regions of the dew
The confines of the world begin to wane,
  And Hesper doth his trembling lamp renew.
Now is the inauguration of the night!
  Nature's release to wearied earth and skies!
  Sweet truce of Care! Labour's brief armistice!
Best, loveliest interlude of dark and light!

The rookery, babbling in the sunken wood;
  The watchdog, barking from the distant farm;
The dim light fading from the hornéd flood,
  That winds the woodland in its silver arm;
The mass'd, and immemorial oaks, whose leaves
  Are husht in yonder heathy dells below;
  The fragrance of the meadows that I know;
The bat, that now his wavering circle weaves

Around these antique towers, and casements deep
  That glimmer, thro' the ivy and the rose,
To the faint moon, which doth begin to creep
  Out of the inmost heart o' the heavens' repose,
To wander, all night long, without a sound,
  Above the fields my feet oft wander'd once;
  The larches tall and dark, which do ensconce
The little churchyard, in whóse hallow'd ground

Sleep half the simple friends my childhood knew:
  All, all the sounds and sights of this blest hour,

Sinking within my heart of hearts, like dew,
Revive that so long parcht and drooping flower
Of youth, the world's hot breath for many years
Hath burn'd and wither'd; till once more, once more,
The revelation and the dream of yore
Return to solace these sad eyes with tears!

Where now, alone, a solitary man,
I pace once more the pathways of my home,
Light-hearted, and together, once we ran,
I, and the infant guide that used to roam
With me, the meads and meadow-banks among,
At dusk and dawn. How light those little feet
Danced thro' the dancing grass, and waving wheat,
Where'er, far off, we heard the cuckoo's song!

I know now, little Ella, what the flowers
Said to you then, to make your cheek so pale;
And why the blackbird in our laurel bowers
Spake to you, only; and the poor, pink snail
Fear'd less your steps than those of the May-shower.
It was not strange these creatures loved you so,
And told you all. 'Twas not so long ago
You were, yourself, a bird, or else a flower.

And, little Ella, you were pale, because
So soon you were to die. I know that now.
And why there ever seem'd a sort of gauze
Over your deep blue eyes, and sad young brow.
You were too good to grow up, Ella, you,
And be a woman such as I have known!
And so upon your heart they put a stone,
And left you, dear, amongst the flowers and dew.

God's will is good. He knew what would be best.
I will not weep thee, darling, any more;

I have not wept thee; tho' my heart, opprest
With many memories, for thy sake is sore.
God's will is good, and great His wisdom is.
Thou wast a little star, and thou didst shine
Upon my cradle; but thou wast not mine,
Thou wast not mine, my darling; thou art His.

My morning star! twin sister of my soul!
My little elfin friend from Fairy-Land!
Whose memory is yet innocent of the whole
Of that which makes me doubly need thy hand,
Thy little guiding hand so soon withdrawn!
Here where I find so little like to thee.
For thou wert as the breath of dawn to me,
Starry, and pure, and brief as is the dawn.

Thy knight was I, and thou my Fairy Queen.
('Twas in the days of love and chivalry!)
And thou didst hide thee in a bower of green.
But thou so well hast hidden thee, that I
Have never found thee since. And thou didst set
Many a task, and quest, and high emprise,
Ere I should win my guerdon from thine eyes,
So many, and so many, that not yet

My tasks are ended or my wanderings o'er.
But some day thou wilt send across the main
A magic bark, and I shall quit this shore
Of care, and find thee, in thy bower, again;
And thou wilt say "My brother, hast thou found
Our home, at last?" . . . Whilst I, in answer, Sweet,
Shall heap my life's last booty at thy feet,
And bare my breast with many a bleeding wound.

The spoils of time! the trophies of the world!
The keys of conquer'd towns, and captived kings;

And many a broken sword, and banner furl'd;
The heads of giants, and swart Soldan's rings;
And many a maiden's scarf; and many a wand
Of baffled wizard; many an amulet;
And many a shield, with mine own heart's blood wet;
And jewels, dear, from many a distant land!

God's will is good. He knew what would be best.
I thought last year to pass away from life.
I thought my toils were ended, and my quest
Completed, and my part in this world's strife
Accomplisht. And, behold! about me now
There rest the gloom, the glory, and the awe
Of a new martyrdom, no dreams foresaw;
And the thorn-crown hath blossom'd on my brow.

A martyrdom, but with a martyr's joy!
A hope I never hoped for! and a sense
That nothing henceforth ever can destroy:—
Within my breast the serene confidence
Of mercy in the misery of things;
Of meaning in the mystery of all;
Of blessing in whatever may befall;
Of rest predestined to all wanderings.

How sweet, with thee, my sister, to renew,
In lands of light, the search for those bright birds
Of plumage so ethereal in its hue,
And music sweeter than all mortal words,
Which some good angel to our childhood sent
With messages from Paradisal flowers,
So lately left, the scent of Eden bowers
Yet linger'd in our hair, where'er we went!

Now, they are all fled by, this many a year,
Adown the viewless valleys of the wind,
And never more will cross this hemisphere,
Those birds of passage! Never shall I find,

Dropt from the flight, you follow'd, dear, so far
That you will never come again, I know,
One plumelet on the paths by which I go,
Missing thy light there, O my morning star!

Soft, over all, doth ancient twilight cast
Her dim gray robe, vague as futurity,
And sad and hoary as the ghostly past,
Till earth assumes invisibility.
I hear the night-bird's note, wherewith she starts
The bee within the blossom from his dream.
A light, like hope, from yonder pane doth beam,
And now, like hope, it silently departs.

Hush! from the clock within yon dark church spire,
Another hour broke, clanging, out of time,
And pass'd me, throbbing like my own desire,
Into the sevenfold heavens. And now, the chime
Over the vale, the woodland, and the river,
More faint, more far, a quivering echo, strays
From that small twelve-hour'd circle of our days,
And spreads, and spreads, to the great round, Forever.

Pensive, the sombre ivied porch I pass.
Thro' the dark hall, the sound of my own feet
Pursues me, like the ghost of what I was,
Into this silent chamber, where I meet
From wall to wall the fathers of my race;
The pictures of the past from wall to wall;
Wandering o'er which, my wistful glances fall,
To sink, at last, on little Ella's face.

This is my home. And hither I return,
After much wandering in the ways of men,
Weary but not outworn. Here, with her urn
Shall Memory come, and be my denizen.
And blue-eyed Hope shall through the window look,

And lean her fair child's face into the room,
What time the hawthorn buds anew, and bloom
The bright forget-me-nots beside the brook.

Father of all which is, or yet may be,
Ere to the pillow which my childhood prest
This night restores my troubled brows, by Thee
May this, the last prayer I have learn'd, be blest!
Grant me to live that I may need from life
No more than life hath given me, and to die
That I may give to death no more than I
Have long abandon'd. And, if toil and strife

Yet in the portion of my days must be,
Firm be my faith, and quiet be my heart!
That so my work may with my will agree,
And strength be mine to calmly fill my part
In Nature's purpose, questioning not the end.
For love is more than raiment or than food.
Shall I not take the evil with the good?
Blessèd to me be all which thou dost send!

Nor blest the least, recalling what hath been,
The knowledge of the evil I have known
Without me, and within me. Since, to lean
Upon a strength far mightier than my own
Such knowledge brought me. In whose strength I stand,
Firmly upheld, even tho', in ruin hurl'd,
The fix'd foundations of this rolling world
Should topple at the waving of Thy hand.

PART III.

HAIL thou! sole Muse that, in an age of toil,
Of all the old Uranian sisterhood,

Art left to light us o'er the furrow'd soil
Of this laborious star! Muse, unsubdued
By that strong hand which hath in ruin raz'd
The temples of dread Jove! Muse most divine,
Albeit but ill by these pale lips of mine,
In days degenerate, first named and praised!

Now the high airy kingdoms of the day
Hyperion holds not. The disloyal seas
Have broken from Poseidon's purple sway.
Thro' Heaven's harmonious golden palaces
No more the silver sandal'd messengers
Slide to sweet airs. Upon Olympus' brow
The gods' great citadel is vacant now.
And not a lute to Love in Lesbos stirs.

But thou wert born not on the Forkéd Hill,
Nor fed from Hybla's hives by Attic bees,
Nor on the honey Cretan oaks distil,
Or once distill'd, when gods had homes in trees,
And young Apollo knew thee not. Yet thou
With Ceres wast, when the pale mother trod
The gloomy pathway to the nether god,
And spake with that dim Power which dwells below

The surface of whatever, where he wends,
The circling sun illumineth. And thou
Wast aye a friend to man. Of all his friends,
Perchance the friend most needed: needed now
Yet more than ever; in a complex age
Which changes while we gaze at it: from heaven
Seeking a sign, and finding no sign given,
And questioning Life's worn book at every page.

Nor ever yet, was song, untaught by thee,
Worthy to live immortally with man.
Wherefore, divine Experience, bend on me
Thy deep and searching eyes. Since life began,
Meek at thy mighty knees, tho' oft reproved,

I have sat, spelling out slow time with tears,
Where down the riddling alphabet of years,
Thy guiding finger o'er the horn-book moved.

And I have put together many names:
Sorrow, and Joy, and Hope, and Memory,
And Love, and Anger; as an infant frames
The initials of a language wherein he
In manhood must with men communicate.
And oft, the words were hard to understand,
Harder to utter; still the solemn hand
Would pause, and point, and wait, and move, and wait;

Till words grew into language. Language grew
To utterance. Utterance into music pass'd.
I sang of all I learn'd, and all I knew.
And, looking upward in thy face, at last,
Beheld it flusht, as when a mother hears
Her infant feebly singing his first hymn,
And dreams she sees, albeit unseen of him,
Some radiant listener lured from other spheres.

Such songs have been my solace many a while
And oft, when other solace I had none,
From grief which lay heart-broken on a smile,
And joy that glitter'd like a winter sun,
And froze, and fever'd: from the great man's scorn,
The mean man's envy; friends' unfriendliness;
Love's want of human kindness, and the stress
Of nights that hoped for nothing from the morn.

From these, and worse than these, did song unbar
A refuge thro' the ivory gate of dreams,
Wherein my spirit grew familiar
With spirits that glide by spiritual streams;
Song hath, for me, unseal'd the genii sleeping
Under mid seas, and lured out of their lair

Beings with wondering eyes, and wondrous hair,
Tame to my feet at twilight softly creeping.

And song hath been my cymbal in the hours
Of triumph; when behind me, far away,
Lay Egypt, with its plagues; and, by strange powers,
Not mine, upheld, life's heaped ocean lay
On either side a passage for my soul.
A passage to the Land of Promise! trod
By giants, where the chosen race of God
Shall find, at last, its long predestin'd goal.

The breath which stirr'd these songs a little while
Has fleeted by; and, with it, fleeted too
The days I sought, thus singing, to beguile
Of thoughts that spring like weeds, which will creep thro'
The blank interstices of ruin'd fanes,
Where Youth, adoring, sacrificed—its heart,
To gods forever fallen.
Now, we part,
My songs and I. We part, and what remains?

Perchance an echo, and perchance no more,
Harp of my heart, from thy brief music dwells
In hearts, unknown, afar: as the wide shore
Retains within its hundred hollow shells
The voices of the spirits of the foam,
Which murmur in the language of the deeps,
Tho' haply far away, to one who keeps
Such ocean wealth to grace an inland home.

Within these cells of song, how frail soe'er,
The vast and wandering tides of human life
Have murmur'd once; and left, in passing, there,
Faint echoes of the tumult and the strife
Of the great ocean of humanity.
Fairies have danced within these hollow caves,

And Memory mused above the moonlit waves,
And Youth, the lover, here hath linger'd by.

I sung of life, as life would have me sing,
Of falsehood, and of evil, and of wrong;
For many a false, and many an evil thing,
I found in life: and by my life my song
Was shaped within me while I sung: I sung
Of Good, for good is life's predestin'd end;
Of Sorrow, for I knew her as my friend;
Of Love, for by his hand my harp was strung.

I have not scrawl'd above the tomb of Youth
Those lying epitaphs, which represent
All virtues, and all excellence, save truth.
'Twere easy, thus, to have been eloquent,
If I had held the fashion, of the age
Which loves to hear its sounding flattery
Blown by all dusty winds from sky to sky,
And find its praises blotting every page.

And yet, the Poet and the Age are one.
And if the age be flaw'd, howe'er minute,
Deep thro' the poet's heart that rent doth run,
And shakes and mars the music of his lute.
It is not that his sympathy is less
With all that lives and all that feels around him,
But that so close a sympathy hath bound him
To these, that he must utter their distress.

We build the bridge, and swing the wondrous wire,
Bind with an iron hoop the rolling world;
Sport with the spirits of the ductile fire;
And leave our spells upon the vapour furl'd;
And cry—Behold the progress of the time!
Yet are we tending in an unknown land,
Whither, we neither ask nor understand,
Far from the peace of our unvalued prime!

And Strength and Force, the fiends which minister
To some new-risen Power beyond our span,
On either hand, with hook and nail, confer
To rivet the Promethean heart of man
Under the ravening and relentless beak
Of unappeasable Desire, which yet
The very vitals of the age doth fret.
The limbs are mighty, but the heart is weak.

Writhe on, Prometheus! or whate'er thou art,
Thou giant sufferer, groaning for a race
Thou canst not save, for all thy bleeding heart!
Thy wail my harp hath waken'd; and my place
Shall be beside thee; and my blessing be
On all that makes me worthy yet to share
Thy lonely martyrdom, and with thee wear
That crown of anguish given to poets, and thee!

If to have wept, and wildly; to have loved
Till love grew torture; to have grieved till grief
Became a part of life; if to have proved
The want of all things; if, to draw relief
From poesy for passion, this avail,
I lack no title to my crown. The sea
Hath sent up nymphs for my society,
The mountains have been moved to hear my wail.

Nature and man were children long ago
In glad simplicity of heart and speech.
Now they are strangers to each other's woe;
And each hath language different from each.
The simplest songs sound sweetest, and most good.
The simplest loves are the most loving ones.
Happier were song's forefathers than their sons.
And Homer sung as Byron never could.

But Homer cannot come again: nor ever
The quiet of the age in which he sung.

This age is one of tumult and endeavour,
And by a fever'd hand its harps are strung.
And yet, I do not quarrel with the time;
Nor quarrel with the tumult of my heart,
Which of the tumult of the age is part;
Because its very weakness is sublime.

The passions are as winds on the wide sea
Of human life; which do impel the sails
Of man's great enterprise, whate'er that be.
The reckless helmsman, caught upon these gales,
Under the roaring gulfs goes down aghast.
The prudent pilot to the steadying breeze
Sparely gives head; and, over perilous seas,
Drops anchor 'mid the Fortunate Isles, at last.

We pray against the tempest and the strife,
The storm, the whirlwind, and the troublous hour,
Which vex the fretful element of life.
Me rather save, O dread disposing Power,
From those dead calms, that flat and hopeless lull,
In which the dull sea rots around the bark,
And nothing moves save the sure-creeping dark,
That slowly settles o'er an idle hull.

For in the storm, the tumult, and the stir
That shakes the soul, man finds his power and place
Among the elements. Deeps with deeps confer,
And Nature's secret settles in her face.
Let ocean to his inmost caves be stirr'd;
Let the wild light be smitten from the cloud.
The decks may reel, the masts be snapt and bow'd,
But God hath spoken out, and man hath heard!

Farewell, you lost inhabitants of my mind,
You fair ephemerals of faded hours!

Farewell, you lands of exile, whence each wind
  Of memory steals with fragrance over flowers!
Farewell Cordelia! Ella! . . . But not so
  Farewell the memories of you which I have
  Till strangers shall be sitting on my grave
And babbling of the dust which lies below.

Blesséd the man whose life, how sad soe'er,
  Hath felt the presence, and yet keeps the trace
Of one pure woman! With religious care
  We close the doors, with reverent feet we pace
The vacant chambers, where, of yore, a Queen
  One night hath rested. From my Past's pale walls
  Yet gleam the unfaded fair memorials
Of her whose beauty there, awhile, hath been.

She pass'd into my youth, at its night-time,
  When low the lamplight, and the music husht.
She pass'd, and pass'd away. Some broken rhyme
  Scrawl'd on the panel or the pane: the crusht
And faded rose she dropp'd: the page she turn'd
  And finish'd not: the ribbon or the knot
  That flutter'd from her . . . Stranger, harm them
    not!
I keep these sacred relics undiscern'd.

Men's truths are often lies, and women's lies
  Often the setting of a truth most tender
In an unconscious poesy. The child cries
  To clutch the star that lights its rosy splendour
In airy Edens of the west afar.
  "Ah, folly!" sighs the father, o'er his book.
  "Millions of miles above thy foolish nook
Of infantile desire, the Hesperus-star

"Descends not, child, to twinkle on thy cot."
  Then readjusts his blind-wise spectacles,
While tears to sobs are changing, were it not
  The mother, with those tender syllables

Which even Dutch mothers can make musical too,
Murmurs, "Sleep, sleep my little one! and I
Will pluck thy star for thee, and by and bye
Lay it upon thy pillow bright with dew."

And the child sleeps, and dreams of stars whose light
Beams in his own bright eyes when he awakes.
So sleep! so dream! If aught I read aright
That star, poor babe, which o'er thy cradle shakes,
Thy fate may fall, in after years, to be
That other child that, like thee, loves the star,
And, like thee, weeps to find it all so far,
Feeling its force in his nativity :—

That other infant, all as weak, as wild,
As passionate, and as helpless, as thou art,
Whom men will call a Poet (Poet, or child,
The star is still so distant from the heart!)
If so, heaven grant that thou may'st find at last,
Since such there are, some woman, whose sweet smile,
Pitying, may thy fond fancy yet beguile
To dream the star, which thou hast sought, thou hast!

For men, if thou shouldst heed what they may say,
Will break thy heart, or leave thee, like themselves
No heart for breaking. Wherefore I do pray
My book may lie upon no learnéd shelves,
But that in some deep summer eve, perchance,
Some woman, melancholy-eyed, and pale,
Whose heart, like mine, hath suffered, may this tale
Read by the soft light of her own romance.

Go forth over the wide world, Song of mine!
As Noah's dove out of his bosom flew

Over the desolate, vast, and wandering brine.
Seek thou thy nest afar. Thy plaint renew
From heart to heart, and on from land to land
Fly boldly, till thou find that unknown friend
Whose face, in dreams, above my own doth bend.
Then tell that spirit, what it will understand,

Why men can tell to strangers all the tale
From friends reserved. And tell that spirit, my Song,
Wherefore I have not falter'd to unveil
The cryptic forms of error and of wrong.
And say, I suffer'd more than I recorded,
That each man's life is all men's lesson. Say,
And let the world believe thee, as it may,
Thy tale is true, however weakly worded.

CLYTEMNESTRA,

THE EARL'S RETURN, THE ARTIST,

AND OTHER POEMS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AGAMEMNON.	CLYTEMNESTRA.
ÆGISTHUS.	ELECTRA.
ORESTES.	CASSANDRA.
PHOCIAN.	CHORUS.
HERALD.	

SCENE.—*Before the Palace of Agamemnon in Argos. Trophies, amongst which, the shield of Agamemnon, on the wall.*

Time, *Morning. The action continues till Sunset.*

I. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

MORNING at last! at last the lingering day
Creeps o'er the dewy side of yon dark world.
O dawning light already on the hills!
O universal earth, and air, and thou,
First freshness of the east, which art a breath
Breath'd from the rapture of the gods, who bless
Almost all other prayers on earth but mine!
Wherefore to me is solacing sleep denied?
And honourable rest, the right of all?
So that no medicine of the slumbrous shell,
Brimm'd with divinest draughts of melody,
Nor silence under dreamful canopies,
Nor purple cushions of the lofty couch
May lull this fever for a little while.
Wherefore to me—to me, of all mankind,

This retribution for a deed undone?
For many men outlive their sum of crimes,
And eat, and drink, and lift up thankful hands,
And take their rest securely in the dark.
Am I not innocent—or more than these?
There is no blot of murder on my brow,
Nor any taint of blood upon my robe.
—It is the thought! it is the thought!... and men
Judge us by acts!.. as tho' one thunder-clap
Let all Olympus out. Unquiet heart,
Ill fares it with thee since, ten sad years past,
In one wild hour of unacquainted joy
Thou didst set wide thy lonely bridal doors
For a forbidden guest to enter in!
Last night, methought pale Helen, with a frown,
Swept by me, murmuring, "I—such as thou—
A Queen in Greece—weak-hearted (woe is me!)
Allured by love—did, in an evil hour,
Fall off from duty. Sorrow came. Beware!"
And then, in sleep, there pass'd a baleful band—
The ghosts of all the slaughter'd under Troy,
From this side Styx, who cried, "For such a crime
"We fell from our fair palaces on earth,
"And wander, starless, here. For such a crime
"A thousand ships were launch'd, and tumbled down
"The topless towers of Ilion, tho' they rose
"To magic music, in the time of Gods!"
With such fierce thoughts for evermore at war,
Vext not alone by hankering wild regrets
But fears, yet worse, of that which soon must come,
My heart waits arm'd, and from the citadel
Of its high sorrow, sees far off dark shapes,
And hears the footsteps of Necessity
Tread near, and nearer, hand in hand with Woe.
Last night the flaming Herald warning urged
Up all the hills—small time to pause and plan!
Counsel is weak: and much remains to do,
That Agamemnon, and, if else remain

Of that enduring band who sail'd for Troy
Ten years ago (and some sail'd Lethe-ward),
Find us not unprepared for their return.

But—hark! I hear the tread of nimble feet
That sound this way. The rising town is pour'd
About the festive altars of the Gods,
And from the heart of the great Agora,
Lets out its gladness for this last night's news.
—Ah, so it is! Insidious, sly Report,
Sounding oblique, like Loxian oracles,
Tells double-tongued (and with the self-same voice!)
To some new gladness, new despair to some.

II. CHORUS AND CLYTEMNESTRA.

CHORUS.

O dearest Lady, daughter of Tyndarus!
With purple flowers we come, and offerings—
Oil, and wine; and cakes of honey,
Soothing, unadulterate; tapestries
Woven by white Argive maidens,
God-descended (woven only
For the homeward feet of Heroes)
To celebrate this glad intelligence
Which last night the fiery courier
Brought us, posting up from Ilion,
Wheel'd above the dusky circle
Of the hills from lighted Ida.
For now (Troy lying extinguisht
Underneath a mighty Woe)
Our King and chief of men,
Agamemnon, returning
(And with him the hope of Argos),
Shall worship at the Tutelary Altars
Of their dear native land:
In the Fane of ancient Herë,

Or the great Lycæan God;
Immortally crown'd with reverend honour!
But tell us wherefore, O godlike woman,
Having a lofty trouble in your eye,
You walk alone with loosened tresses?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall the ship toss, and yet the helm not heave?
Shall they drowse sitting at the lower oars,
When those that hold the middle benches wake?
He that is yet sole eye of all our state
Shining not here, shall ours be shut in dreams?
But haply you (thrice happy!) prove not this,
The curse of Queens, and worse than widow'd wives—
To wake, and hear, all night, the wandering gnat
Sing thro' the silent chambers, while Alarm,
In place of Slumber, by the haunted couch
Stands sentinel; or when from coast to coast
Wails the night-wandering wind, or when o'er heaven
Boötes hath unleash'd his fiery hounds,
And Night her glittering camps hath set, and lit
Her watch-fires thro' the silence of the skies,
—To count ill chances in the dark, and feel
Deserted pillows wet with tears, not kisses,
Where kisses once fell.
But now Expectation
Stirs up such restless motions of the blood
As suffer not my lids to harbour sleep.
Wherefore, O belov'd companions,
I wake betimes, and wander up and down,
Looking toward the distant hill-tops,
From whence shall issue fair fulfilment
Of all our ten-years' hoping. For, behold!
Troy being captiv'd, we shall see once more
Those whom we loved in days of old.
Yet some will come not from the Phrygian shore,
But there lie weltering to the surf and wind;

Exil'd from day, in darkness blind,
Or having crost unhappy Styx.
And some who left us full of vigorous youth
Shall greet us now gray-headed men.
But if our eyes behold again
Our long-expected chief, in truth,
Fortune for us hath thrown the Treble Six.

CHORUS.

By us, indeed, these things are also wisht.
Wherefore, if now to this great son of Atreus
(Having surviv'd the woful walls of Troy),
With us, once more, the Gods permit to stand
A glad man by the pillars of his hearth,
Let his dear life henceforth be such wherein
The Third Libation often shall be pour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And let his place be number'd with the Gods,
Who overlook the world's eternal walls,
Out of all reach of sad calamities.

CHORUS.

It is not well, I think, that men should set
Too near the Gods any of mortal kind :
But brave men are as Gods upon the earth.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And whom Death daunts not, these are truly brave.

CHORUS.

But more than all I reckon that man blest,
Who, having sought Death nobly, finds it not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Except he find it where he does not seek.

CHORUS.

You speak in riddles.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

For so Wisdom speaks.
But now do you with garlands wreathe the altars,
While I, within, the House prepare.
That so our King, at his returning,
With his golden Armament,
Find us not unaware
Of the greatness of the event.

CHORUS.

Soon shall we see the faces that we loved.
Brother once more clasping brother,
As in the unforgotten days:
And heroes, meeting one another
(Men by glorious toils approved)
Where once they roved,
Shall rove again the old familiar ways.
And they that from the distance come
Shall feed their hearts with tales of home;
And tell the famous story of the war,
Rumour'd sometime from afar.
Now shall these again behold
The ancient Argos; and the grove
Long since trod
By the frenzied child of Inachus;
And the Forum, famed of old,
Of the wolf-destroying God;
And the opulent Mycænæ,
Home of the Pelopidæ,
While they rove with those they love,
Holding pleasant talk with us.
O how gloriously they went,
That avenging Armament!
As tho' Olympus in her womb
No longer did entomb
The greatness of a bygone world—
Gods and godlike men—
But cast them forth again

To frighten Troy: such storm was hurl'd
On her devoted towers
By the retributive Deity,
Whosoe'er he be
Of the Immortal Powers—
Or mad'ning Pan, if he chastise
His Shepherd's Phrygian treacheries;
Or vengeful Loxias; or Zeus,
Anger'd for the shame and abuse
Of a great man's hospitality.

As wide as is Olympus' span
Is the power of the high Gods;
Who, in their golden blest abodes
See all things, looking from the sky;
And Heaven is hard to pacify
For the wickedness of man.
My heart is fill'd with vague forebodings,
And opprest by unknown terrors
Lest, in the light of so much gladness,
Rise the shadow of ancient wrong.
O Dæmon of the double lineage
Of Tantalus; and the Pleisthenidæ,
Inexorable in thy mood,
On the venerable threshold
Of the ancient House of Pelops
Surely is enough of blood!
Wherefore does my heart misgive me?
Wherefore comes this doubt to grieve me?
O, may no Divine Envy
Follow home the Argive army,
Being vext for things ill-done
In wilful pride of stubborn war,
Long since, in the distant lands!
May no Immortal wrath pursue
Our dear King, the Light of Argos,
For the unhappy sacrifice
Of a daughter; working evil
In the dark heart of a woman;

Or some household treachery,
And a curse from kindred hands!

III. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

[*Reëntering from the house.*

To-morrow . . . ay, what if to-day? . . . Well—
then?
Why, if those tongues of flame, with which last night
The land was eloquent, spoke certain truth,
By this perchance thro' green Saronic rocks
Those black ships glide . . . perchance . . . well,
what's to fear?
'Twere well to dare the worst—to know the end—
Die soon, or live secure. What's left to add
To years of nights like those which I have known?
Shall I shrink now to meet one little hour
Which I have dared to contemplate for years?
By all the Gods, not so! The end crowns all,
Which if we fail to seize, that's also lost
Which went before: as who would lead a host
Thro' desolate dry places, yet return
In sight of kingdoms, when the Gods are roused
To mark the issue? . . . And yet, yet—
I think
Three nights ago there must have been sea-storms.
The wind was wild among the Palace towers:
Far off upon the hideous Element
I know it huddled up the petulant waves,
Whose shapeless and bewildering precipices
Led to the belly of Orcus . . . oh, to slip
Into dark Lethe from a dizzy plank,
When even the Gods are reeling on the poop!
To drown at night, and have no sepulchre!—
That were too horrible! . . . yet it may be
Some easy chance, that comes with little pain,

Might rid me of the haunting of those eyes,
And these wild thoughts. . . . To know he roved among
His old companions in the Happy Fields,
And ranged with heroes—I still innocent!
Sleep would be natural then.
Yet will the old time
Never return! never those peaceful hours!
Never that careless heart! and nevermore,
Ah, nevermore that laughter without pain!
But I, that languish for repose, must fly it,
Nor, save in daring, doing, taste of rest.
Oh to have lost all these! To have barter'd calm,
And all the irrevocable wealth of youth,
And gain'd . . . what? But this change had surely come,
Even were all things other than they are.
I blame myself o'ermuch, who should blame time,
And life's inevitable loss, and fate,
And days grown lovelier in the retrospect.
We change: wherefore look back? The path to safety
Lies forward . . . forward ever.

[*In passing toward the house she recognizes the shield of Agamemnon, and pauses before it.*

Ha! old shield,
Hide up for shame that honest face of thine.
Stare not so bluntly at us . . . Oh, this man!
Why sticks the thought of him so in my heart?
If I had loved him once—if for one hour—
Then were there treason in this falling off.
But never did I feel this wretched heart
Until it leap'd beneath Ægisthus' eyes.
Who could have so forecounted all from first?
From that flusht moment when his hand in mine
Rested a thought too long, a touch too kind,
To leave its pulse unwarm'd . . . but I remember
I dream'd sweet dreams that night, and slept till dawn,

And woke with flutterings of a happy thought,
And felt, not worse, but better . . . and now . . .
now?
When first a strange and novel tenderness
Quiver'd in these salt eyes, had one said then
"A bead of dew may drag a deluge down:"—
In that first pensive pause, through which I watch'd
Unwonted sadness on Ægisthus' brows,
Had some one whisper'd, "Ay, the summer-cloud
Comes first: the tempest follows."—
Well, what's past
Is past. Perchance the worst's to follow yet.
How thou art hackt, and hewn, and bruis'd, old
shield!
Was the whole edge of the war against one man?
But one thrust more upon this dexter ridge
Had quite cut thro' the double inmost hide.
He must have stood to it well! Oh, he was cast
I' the mould of Titans: a magnificent man,
With head and shoulders like a God's. He seem'd
Too brimful of this merry vigorous life
To spill it all out at one stab o' the sword.
Yet that had help'd much ill . . . oh Destiny
Makes cowards or makes culprits of us all!
Ah, had some Trojan weapon . . . Fool! fool! fool!
Surely sometimes the unseen Eumenides
Do prompt our musing moods with wicked hints,
And lash us for our crimes ere we commit them.
Here, round this silver boss, he cut my name,
Once—long ago: he cut it as he lay
Tired out with brawling pastimes—prone—his
limbs
At length diffused—his head droopt in my lap—
His spear flung by: Electra by the hearth
Sat with the young Orestes on her knee;
While he, with an old broken sword, hack'd out
These crooked characters, and laugh'd to see
(Sprawl'd from the unused strength of his large
hands)

The marks make CLYTEMNESTRA.

How he laugh'd!
Ægisthus' hands are smaller.
Yet I know
That matrons envied me my husband's strength.
And I remember when he strode among
The Argive crowd he topp'd them by a head,
And tall men stood wide-eyed to look at him,
Where his great plumes went tossing up and down
The brazen prores drawn out upon the sand.
War on his front was graved, as on thy disk,
Shield! which he left to keep his memory
Grand in men's mouths: that some revered old man,
Winning to this the eyes of our hot youth,
Might say, "'Twas here, and here—this dent, and that—
On such, and such a field (which we remember)
That Agamemnon, in the great old time,
Held up the Battle."
Now lie there, and rust!
Thy uses all have end. Thy master's home
Should harbour none but friends.
O triple brass,
Iron, and oak! the blows of blundering men
Clang idly on you: what fool's strength is yours!
For, surely, not the adamantine tunic
Of Ares, nor whole shells of blazing plates,
Nor ashen spear, nor all the cumbrous coil
Of seven bull's hides may guard the strongest king
From one defenceless woman's quiet hate.

What noise was that? Where can Ægisthus be?
Ægisthus!—my Ægisthus! . . . There again!
Louder, and longer—from the Agora—
A mighty shout: and now I see i' the air
A rolling dust the wind blows near. Ægisthus!
O much I fear . . . this wild-will'd race of ours
Doth ever, like a young unbroken colt,
Chafe at the straighten'd bridle of our state—

If they should find him lone, irresolute,
As is his wont . . . I know he lacks the eye
And forehead wherewith crown'd Capacity
Awes rash Rebellion back.
Again that shout!
Gods keep Ægisthus safe! myself will front
This novel storm. How my heart leaps to danger!
I have been so long a pilot on rough seas,
And almost rudderless!
O yet 'tis much
To feel a power, self-centred, self-assured,
Bridling a glorious danger! as when one
That knows the nature of the elements
Guides some frail plank with sublime skill that wins
Progress from all obstruction; and, erect,
Looks bold and free down all the dripping stars,
Hearing the hungry storm boom baffled, by.
Ægisthus! . . . hark! . . . Ægisthus! . . . there . . .
Ægisthus!
I would to all the Gods I knew him safe!
Who comes this way, guiding his racing feet
Safe to us, like a nimble charioteer?

IV. CLYTEMNESTRA. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, gloom-bird! are there prodigies about?
What new ill-thing sent thee before?

HERALD.

O Queen—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak, if thou hast a voice! I listen.

HERALD.

O Queen—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hath an ox trodden on thy tongue? . . . Speak then!

HERALD.

O Queen (for haste hath caught away my breath),
The King is coming.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Say again—the King
Is coming—

HERALD.

Even now, the broad sea-fields
Grow white with flocks of sails, and toward the west
The sloped horizon teems with rising beaks.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The people know this?

HERALD.

Heard you not the noise?
For soon as this wing'd news had toucht the gates
The whole land shouted in the sun.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So soon!
The thought's outsped by the reality,
And halts agape . . . the King—

HERALD.

How she is moved!
A noble woman!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Wherefore beat so fast,
Thou foolish heart? 'tis not thy master—

HERALD.

Truly
She looks all over Agamemnon's mate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Destiny, Destiny! The deed's half done.

HERALD.

She will not speak, save by that brooding eye
Whose light is language. Some great thought, I see,
Mounts up the royal chambers of her blood,
As a king mounts his palace; holds high pomp
In her Olympian bosom; gains her face,
Possesses all her noble glowing cheek
With sudden state; and gathers grandly up
Its slow majestic meanings in her eyes!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So quick this sudden joy hath taken us,
I scarce can realize the sum of it.
You say the King comes here—the King, my husband,
Whom we have waited for ten years—O joy!
Pardon our seeming roughness at the first.
Hope, that will often fawn upon despair
And flatter desperate chances, when the event
Falls at our feet, soon takes a querulous tone,
And jealous of that perfect joy she guards
(Lest the ambrosial fruit by some rude hand
Be stol'n away from her, and never tasted),
Barks like a lean watch-dog at all who come.
But now do you, with what good speed you may,
Make known this glad intelligence to all.
Ourselves, within, as best befits a wife
And woman, will prepare my husband's house.
Also, I pray you, summon to our side
Our cousin, Ægisthus. We would speak with him.
We would that our own lips should be the first

To break these tidings to him; so obtaining
New joy by sharing his. And, for yourself,
Receive our gratitude. For this great news
Henceforth you hold our royal love in fee.
Our fairest fortunes from this day I date,
And to the House of Tantalus new honour.

HERALD.

She's gone! With what a majesty she fill'd
The whole of space! The statues of the Gods
Are not so godlike. She has Herë's eyes,
And looks immortal!

V. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*as she ascends the steps of the Palace*).

So . . . while on the verge
Of some wild purpose we hang dizzily,
Weighing the danger of the leap below
Against the danger of retreating steps,
Upon a sudden, some forecast event,
Issuing full-arm'd from Councils of the Gods,
Strides to us, plucks us by the hair, and hurls
Headlong pale conscience, to the abyss of crime.
Well—I shrink not. 'Tis but a leap in life.
There's fate in this. Why is he here so soon?
The sight of whose abhorrëd eyes will add
Whatever lacks of strength to this resolve.
Away with shame! I have had enough of it.
What's here for shame? . . . the weak against the strong?
And if the weak be victor? . . . what of that?
Tush! . . . there—my soul is set to it. What need
Of argument to justify an act
Necessity compels, and must absolve?
I have been at play with scruples—like a girl.
Now they are all flung by. I have talk'd with Crime

Too long to play the prude. These thoughts have been
Wild guests by night. Now I shall dare to do
That which I did not dare to think . . . oh, now
I know myself! Crime's easier than we dream.

CHORUS.

Upon the everlasting hills
Thronëd Justice works, and waits.
Between the shooting of a star,
That falls unseen on summer nights
Out of the bosom of the dark,
And the magnificent march of War,
Roll'd from angry lands afar
Round some doomëd city-gates,
Nothing is to her unknown;

Nothing unseen.
Upon her hills she sits alone,
And in the balance of Eternity
Poises against the What-has-been
The weight of What-shall-be.
She sums the account of human ills.
The great world's hoarded wrongs and rights
Are in her treasures. She will mark,
With inward-searching eyes sublime,
The frauds of Time.
The empty future years she fills
Out of the past. All human wills
Sway to her on her reachless heights.

Wisdom she teaches men, with tears,
In the toilful school of years:
Climbing from event to event.
And, being patient, is content
To stretch her sightless arms about,
And find some human instrument,
From many sorrows to work out
Her doubtful, far, accomplishment.

She the two Atridæ sent
Upon Ilion: being intent
The heapt-up wrath of Heaven to move
Against the faithless Phrygian crime.
Them the Thunder-bird of Jove,
Swooping sudden from above,
Summon'd to fates sublime.

She, being injured, for the sake
Of her, the often-wedded wife
(Too loved, and too adoring!),
Many a brazen band did break
In many a breathless battle-strife;
Many a noble life did take;
Many a headlong agony,
Frenzied shout, and frantic cry,
For Greek and Trojan storing.
When, the spear in the onset being shiver'd,
The reeling ranks were roll'd together
Like mad waves mingling in windy weather,
Dasht fearfully over and over each other.
And the plumes of Princes were toss'd and thrust,
And dragg'd about in the shameful dust;
And the painful, panting breath
Came and went in the tug of death:
And the sinews were loosen'd, and the strong knees stricken:
And the eyes began to darken and thicken:
And the arm of the mighty and terrible quiver'd.

O Love! Love! Love! How terrible art thou!
How terrible!
Oh, what hast thou to do
With men of mortal years,
Who toil below,
And have enough of griefs for tears to flow?
Oh, range in higher spheres!
Hast thou, O hast thou, no diviner hues
To paint thy wings, but must transfuse

An Iris-light from tears ?
For human hearts are all too weak to hold thee.
And how, O Love, shall human arms enfold thee ?
There is a seal of sorrow on thy brow.
There is a deadly fire in thy breath.
With life thou lurest, yet thou givest death.
O Love, the Gods are weak by reason of thee ;
And many wars have been upon the earth.
Thou art the sweetest source of saltest sorrows.
Thy blest to-days bring such unblest to-morrows ;
Thy softest hope makes saddest memory.
Thou hadst destruction in thee from the birth ;
Incomprehensible !

O Love, thy brightest bridal garments
Are poison'd, like that robe of agonies
Which Deianira wove for Hercules,
And, being put on, turn presently to cerements !

Thou art unconquered in the fight.
Thou rangest over land and sea.
O let the foolish nations be !
Keep thy divine desire
To upheave mountains or to kindle fire
From the frore frost, and set the world alight.
Why make thy red couch in the damask cheek ?
Or light thy torch at languid eyes ?
Or lie entangled in soft sighs
On pensive lips that will not speak ?
To sow the seeds of evil things
In the hearts of headstrong kings ?
Preparing many a kindred strife
For the fearful future hour ?
O leave the wretched race of man,
Whose days are but the dying seasons' span ;
Vex not his painful life !
Make thy immortal sport
In Heaven's high court,
And cope with Gods that are of equal power.

VI. ELECTRA. CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

Now is at hand the hour of retribution.
For my father, at last returning,
In great power, being greatly injur'd,
Will destroy the base adulterer,
And efface the shameful Past.

CHORUS.

O child of the Godlike Agamemnon!
Leave vengeance to the power of Heaven;
Nor forestall with impious footsteps
The brazen tread of black Erinnys.

ELECTRA.

Is it, besotted with the adulterous sin,
Or, as with flattery pleasing present power,
Or, being intimidate, you speak these words?

CHORUS.

Nay, but desiring justice, like yourself.

ELECTRA.

Yet Justice ofttimes uses mortal means.

CHORUS.

But flings aside her tools when work is done.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O dearest friends, inform me, went this way
Ægisthus?

CHORUS.

Even now, hurrying hitherward,
I see him walk, with irritated eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A reed may show which way the tempest blows.
That face is pale—those brows are dark . . . ah!

VII. ÆGISTHUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Agamemnon—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My husband . . . well?

ÆGISTHUS.

(Whom may the great Gods curse!)
Is scarce an hour hence.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then that hour's yet saved
From sorrow. Smile, Ægisthus—

ÆGISTHUS.

Hear me speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not as your later wont has been to smile—
Quick, fierce, as tho' you scarce could hurry out
The wild thing fast enough; for smiling's sake,
As if to show you could smile, tho' in fear
Of what might follow—but as first you smiled
Years, years ago, when some slow loving thought
Stole down your face, and settled on your lips,
As tho' a sunbeam halted on a rose
And mix'd with fragrance, light. Can you smile still
Just so, Ægisthus?

ÆGISTHUS.

These are idle words,

And like the wanderings of some fever'd brain:
Extravagant phrases, void of import, wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no! you cannot smile so, more. Nor I!

ÆGISTHUS.

Hark! in an hour the King—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hush! listen now—
I hear, far down yon vale, a shepherd piping
Hard by his milk-white flock. The lazy things!
How quietly they sleep or feed among
The dry grass and the acanthus there! . . . and he,
He hath flung his faun-skin by, and white ash-stick,
You hear his hymn? Something of Dryope,
Faunus, and Pan . . . an old wood tale, no doubt!
It makes me think of songs when I was young
I used to sing between the valleys there,
Or higher up among the red ash-berries,
Where the goats climb, and gaze. Do you remember
That evening when we linger'd all alone,
Below the city, and one yellow star
Shook o'er yon temple? . . . ah, and you said then
"Sweet, should this evening never change to night,
But pause, and pause, and stay just so—yon star
Still steadfast—and the moon behind the hill,
Still rising, never risen—would this seem strange?
Or should we say, 'why halts the day so late?'"
Do you remember?

ÆGISTHUS.

Woman! woman! this
Surpasses frenzy! Not a breath of time
Between us and the clutch of Destiny—
Already sound there footsteps at our heels,
Already comes a heat against our cheek,
Already fingers cold among our hair,

And you speak lightly thus, as tho' the day
Linger'd toward nuptial hours!... awake! arouse!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do wake ... well, the King—

ÆGISTHUS.

Even while we speak
Draws near. And we—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Must meet him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Meet? ay ... how?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As mortals should meet fortune—calmly.

ÆGISTHUS.

Quick!
Consult! consult! Yet there is time to choose
The path to follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have chosen it
Long since.

ÆGISTHUS.

How?—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, have we not had ten years
To ripen counsel, and mature resolve?
What's to add now?

ÆGISTHUS.

I comprehend you not.
The time is plucking at our sleeve.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus!
There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up
All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time. Upon this awful strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is not yet.
The Gods allot to us a little space,
Before the contests which must soon begin,
For calmer breathing. All before lies dark
And difficult, and perilous, and strange;
And all behind . . . What if we take one look,
One last long lingering look (before Despair,
The shadow of failure, or remorse, which often
Waits on success, can come 'twixt us and it,
And darken all) at that which yet must seem
Undimm'd in the long retrospect of years—
The beautiful imperishable Past!
Were this not natural, being innocent now
—At least of that which is the greater crime?
To-night we shall not be so.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah, to-night!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

All will be done which now the Gods foresee.
The sun shines still.

ÆGISTHUS.

I oft have mark'd some day
Begin all gold in its flusht orient,
With splendid promise to the waiting world,
And turn to blackness ere the sun ran down.
So draws our love to its dark close. To-night—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall bring our bridals, my Belov'd! For, either
Upon the melancholy shores of Death
(One shadow near the doors of Pluto) greeted
By pale Proserpina, our steps shall be,
Or else, secure, in the great empty palace
We shall sleep crown'd—no noise to startle us—
And Argos silent round us—all our own!

ÆGISTHUS.

In truth I do not dare to think this thing.
For all the Greeks will hate us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What of that?
If that they do not harm us—as who shall?

ÆGISTHUS.

Moreover, tho' we triumph in the act
(And we may fail, and fall) we shall go down
Cover'd with this reproach into the tomb,
Hunted by all the red Eumenides;
And, in the end, the ghost of him we slew,
Being beforehand there, will come between
Us and the awful Judges of the dead!
And no one on this earth will pray for us;
And no hand will hang garlands on our urns,
Either of man, or maid, or little child;
But we shall be dishonour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O faint heart!
When this poor life of ours is done with—all
Its foolish days put by—its bright and dark—
Its praise and blame—roll'd quite away—gone o'er
Like some brief pageant—will it stir us more,
Where we are gone, how men may hoot or shout
After our footsteps, than the dust and garlands

A few mad boys and girls fling in the air
When a great host is pass'd, can cheer or vex
The minds of men already out of sight
Toward other lands, with pæan and with pomp
Array'd near vaster forces? For the future,
We will smoke hecatombs, and build new fanes,
And be you sure the gods deal leniently
With those who grapple for their life, and pluck it
From the closed gripe of Fate, albeit perchance
Some ugly smutch, some drop of blood or so,
A spot here, there a streak, or stain of gore,
Should in the contest fall to them, and mar
That life's original whiteness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Tombs have tongues
That talk in Hades. Think it! Dare we hope,
This done, to be more happy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My Belov'd,
We are not happy—we may never be,
Perchance, again. Yet it is much to think
We have been so: and ev'n tho' we must weep,
We have enjoy'd.
The roses and the thorns
We have pluckt together. We have proved both.
Say,
Was it not worth the bleeding hands they left us
To have won such flowers? And if 'twere possible
To keep them still—keep even the wither'd leaves,
Even the wither'd leaves are worth our care.
We will not tamely give up life—such life!
What tho' the years before, like those behind,
Be dark as clouds the thunder sits among,
Tipt only here and there with a wan gold
More bright for rains between?—'tis much—'tis
more,
For we shall ever think "the sun's behind.

The sun must shine before the day goes down!"
Anything better than the long, long night,
And that perpetual silence of the tomb!
'Tis not for happier hours, but life itself
Which may bring happier hours, we strike at Fate.
Why, tho' from all the treasury of the Past
'Tis but one solitary gem we save—
One kiss more such as we have kist, one smile,
One more embrace, one night more such as those
Which we have shared, how costly were the prize,
How richly worth the attempt! Indeed, I know,
When yet a child, in those dim pleasant dreams
A girl will dream, perchance in twilit hours,
Or under eve's first star (when we are young
Happiness seems so possible—so near!
One says, "it must go hard, but I shall find it!")
Ofttimes I mused—"My life shall be my own,
To make it what I will." It is their fault
(I thought) who miss the true delights. I thought
Men might have saved themselves: they flung away,
Too easily abasht, life's opening promise:
But all things will be different for me.
For I felt life so strong in me! indeed
I was so sure of my own power to love
And to enjoy—I had so much to give,
I said, "be sure it must win something back!"
Youth is so confident! And tho' I saw
All women sad—not only those I knew,
As Helen (whom from youth I knew, nor ever
Divined that sad impenetrable smile
Which oft would darken thro' her lustrous eyes,
As drawing slowly down o'er her cold cheek
The yellow braids of odorous hair, she turn'd
From Menelaus praising her, and sigh'd—
That was before he, flinging bitterly down
The trampled parsley-crown and undrain'd goblet,
Curs'd before all the Gods his sudden shame
And young Hermione's deserted youth!)
Not only her—but all whose lives I learn'd,

Medea, Deianeira, Ariadne,
And many others—all weak, wrong'd, opprest,
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am now—
Yet in their fate I would not see my own,
Nor grant allegiance to that general law
From which a few, I knew a very few,
With whom it seem'd I also might be number'd,
Had yet escaped securely :—so exempting
From this world's desolation everywhere
One fate—my own !
Well, that was foolish ! Now
I am not so exacting. As we move
Further and further down the path of fate
To the sure tomb, we yield up, one by one,
Our claims on Fortune, till with each new year
We seek less and go further to obtain it.
'Tis the old tale—aye, all of us must learn it !
But yet I would not empty-handed stand
Before the House of Hades. Still there's life,
And hope with life ; and much that may be done.
Look up, O thou most dear and cherisht head !
We'll strive still, conquering ; or, if falling, fall
In sight of grand results.

ÆGISTHUS.

May these things be !
I know not. All is vague. I should be strong
Even were you weak. 'Tis otherwise—I see
No path to safety sure. We have done ill things.
Best let the past be past, lest new griefs come.
Best we part now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Part ! what, to part from thee !
Never till death—not in death even, part !

ÆGISTHUS.

But one course now is left.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And that is—

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

I care not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Flight! I am a Queen.
A goddess once you said—and why not goddess?
Seeing the Gods are mightier than we
By so much more of courage. Oh, not I,
But you, are mad.

ÆGISTHUS.

Nay, wiser than I was.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And you will leave me?

ÆGISTHUS.

Not if you will come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This was the Atlas of the world I built!

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight! . . . yes, I know not . . . somewhere . . . anywhere.
You come? . . . you come not? . . . well? . . . no time to pause!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And this is he—this he, the man I loved!
And this is retribution! O my heart!
O Agamemnon, how art thou avenged!
And I have done so much for him! . . . would do
So much! . . . a universe lies ruin'd here.
Now by Apollo, be a man for once!
Be for once strong, or be forever weak!
If shame be dead, and honour be no more,
No more true faith, nor that which in old time
Made us like Gods, sublime in our high place,
Yet all surviving instincts warn from flight.
Flight!—oh, impossible! Even now the steps
Of fate are at the threshold. Which way fly?
For every avenue is barr'd by death.
Will these not scout your flying heels? If now
They hate us powerful, will they love us weak?
No land is safe; nor any neighbouring king
Will harbour Agamemnon's enemy.
Reflect on Troy; her ashes smoulder yet.

ÆGISTHUS.

Her words compel me with their awful truth.
For so would vengeance hound and earth us down.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If I am weak to move you by that love
You swore long since—and seal'd it with false lips!—
Yet lives there nothing of the ambitious will?
Of those proud plots, and dexterous policy,
On which you builded such high hopes, and swore
To rule this people Agamemnon rules;
Supplant him eminent on his own throne,
And push our power thro' Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

The dream was great!

It was a dream. We dream't it like a king.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, and shall so fulfil it—like a King!
Who talks of flight? For now, bethink you well,
If to live on, the byword of a world,
Be any gain, even such flight offers not.
Will long-arm'd Vengeance never find you out
When you have left the weapon in her hands?
Be bold, and meet her! Who forestall the bolts
Of heaven, the Gods deem worthy of the Gods.
Success is made the measure of our acts.
And, think Ægisthus, there has been one thought
Before us in the intervals of years,
Between us ever in the long dark nights,
When, lying all awake, we heard the wind.
Did you shrink then? or, only closer drawing
Your lips to mine, your arms about my neck,
Say, "Who would fear such chances, when he saw
Behind them such a prize for him as this?"
Do you shrink now? Dare you put all this from you?
Revoke the promise of those years, and say
This prospect meets you unprepared at last?
Our motives are so mixt in their beginnings
And so confused, we recognize them not
Till they are grown to acts; but ne'er were ours
So blindly wov'n, but what we both untangled
Out of the intricacies of the heart
One purpose:—being found, best grapple to it.
For to conceive ill deeds yet dare not do them,
This is not virtue, but a twofold shame.
Between the culprit and the Demi-god
There's but one difference men regard—success.
The weakly-wicked shall be doubly damned!

ÆGISTHUS.

I am not weak . . . . what will you? . . . . oh, too weak

To bear this scorn! . . . She is a godlike fiend
And hell and heaven seem meeting in her eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Those who on perilous ventures once embark
Should burn their ships, nor ever dream return.
Better, tho' all Olympus march'd on us,
To die like fallen Titans, scorning Heaven,
Than live like slaves in scorn of our own selves!

ÆGISTHUS.

We wait then? Good! and dare this desperate chance.
And if we fall (as we, I think, must fall)
It is but some few sunny hours we lose,
Some few bright days. True! and a little less
Of life, or else of wrong a little more,
What's that? For one shade more or less the night
Will scarce seem darker or lighter—the long night!
We'll fall together, if we fall; and if—
Oh if we live!—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, that was noblier thought!
Now you grow back into yourself, your true self,
My King! my chosen! my glad careless helpmate
In the old time! we shared its pleasant days
Royally, did we not? How brief they were!
Nor will I deem you less than what I know
You have it in you to become, for this
Strange freakish fear—this passing brief alarm.
Do I not know the noble steed will start
Aside, scared lightly by a straw, a shadow,
A thorn-bush in the way, while the dull mule
Plods stupidly adown the dizziest paths?
And oft indeed, such trifles will dismay
The finest and most eager spirits, which yet
Daunt not a duller mind. O love, be sure

Whate'er betide, whether for well or ill,
Thy fate and mine are bound up in one skein,
Clotho must cut them both inseparate.
You dare not leave me—had you wings for flight!
You shall not leave me! You are mine, indeed,
(As I am yours!) by my strong right of grief.
Not death together, but together life!
Life—life with safe and honourable years,
And power to do with these that which we would!
—His lips comprest—his eye dilates—he is saved!
O, when strong natures into frailer ones
Have struck deep root, if one exalt not both,
Both must drag down and perish!

ÆGISTHUS.

If we should live—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And we shall live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Yet . . . yet—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! shrinking still?
I'll do the deed. Do not stand off from me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Terrible Spirit!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, not terrible,
Not to thee terrible—O say not so!
To thee I never have been anything
But a weak, passionate, unhappy woman
(O woe is me!) and now you fear me—

ÆGISTHUS.

No;
But rather worship.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my heart, my heart,
It sends up all its anguish in this cry—
Love me a little!

ÆGISTHUS.

What a spell she has
To sway the inmost courses of the soul!
My spirit is held up to such a height
I dare not breathe. How finely sits this sorrow
Upon her, like the garment of a God!
I cannot fathom her. Does the same birth
Bring forth the monster and the demi-god?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will not doubt! All's lost, if love be lost—
Peace, honour, innocence—gone, gone! all gone!
And you, too—you, poor baffled crownless schemer,
Whose life my love makes royal, clothes in purple,
Establishes in state, without me, answer me,
What should you do but perish, as is fit?
O love, you dare not cease to love me now!
We have let the world go by us. We have trusted
To ourselves only: if we fail ourselves
What shall avail us now? Without my love
What rests for you but universal hate,
And Agamemnon's sword? Ah, no—you love me,
Must love me, better than you ever loved—
Love me, I think, as you love life itself!
Ægisthus! Speak Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

O great heart!
I am all yours. Do with me what you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, if you love me, I have strength for both.
And you do love me still?

ÆGISTHUS.

O more, thrice more,
Thrice more than wert thou Aphroditë's self
Stept zoned and sandal'd from the Olympian Feast,
Or first reveal'd among the pink sea-foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am that
Which thou hast made me—nothing of myself.
Once, all unheedful, careless of myself,
And wholly ignorant of what I was,
I grew up as a reed some wind will touch,
And wake to prophecy—till then all mute,
And void of melody—a foolish weed!
My soul was blind, and all my life was dark,
And all my heart pined with some ignorant want.
I moved about, a shadow in the house,
And felt unwedded though I was a wife;
And all the men and women which I saw
Were but as pictures painted on a wall:
To me they had not either heart, or brain,
Or lips, or language—pictures! nothing more.
Then, suddenly, athwart those lonely hours
Which, day by day dream'd listlessly away,
Led to the dark and melancholy tomb,
Thy presence passed and touch'd me with a soul.
My life did but begin when I found thee.
O what a strength was hidden in this heart!
As, all unvalued, in its cold dark cave
Under snow hills, some rare and priceless gem
May sparkle and burn, so in this life of mine
Love lay shut up. You broke the rock away,
You lit upon the jewel that it hid,
You pluck'd it forth—to wear it, my Belov'd!
To set in the crown of thy dear life!
To embellish fortune! Cast it not away.
Now call me by the old familiar names:
Call me again your Queen, as once you used;
Your large-eyed Herë!

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, you are a Queen
That should have none but Gods to rule over!
Make me immortal with one costly kiss!

VIII. CHORUS. ELECTRA. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! I hear the people shout.

ELECTRA.

See how these two do mutually confer,
Hatching new infamy. Now will he dare,
In his unbounded impudence, to meet
My father's eyes? The hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O love, be bold! the hour is nigh at hand.

ELECTRA.

Laden with retribution, lingering slow.

ÆGISTHUS.

A time in travail with some great distress.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, rather safety for the rest of time.
O love! O hate!

ELECTRA.

O vengeance!

ÆGISTHUS.

O wild chance!
If favouring fate—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Despair is more than fate.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King is on his march.

ÆGISTHUS.

Did you hear that?

ELECTRA.

The hour is nigh at hand!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me to deal with these. I know the arts
That guide the doubtful purpose of discourse
Thro' many windings to the appointed goal.
I'll draw them on to such a frame of mind
As best befits our purpose. You, meanwhile,
Scatter vague words among the other crowd,
Lest the event, when it is due, fall foul
Of unpropitious natures.

ÆGISTHUS.

Do you fear
The helpless, blind ill-will of such a crowd?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He only fears mankind who knows them not.
But him I praise not who despises them.
Whence come, Electra?

ELECTRA.

From my father's hearth
To meet him; for the hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So do our hopes race hotly to one end,
(A noble rivalry!) as who shall first

Embrace this happy fortune. Tarry not.
We too will follow.

ELECTRA.

Justice, O be swift!

IX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A froward child! She's gone. My blood's in her.
Her father's, too, looks out of that proud face.
She is too bold . . . ha, well—Ægisthus? . . . gone!
O fate! to be a woman! You great Gods,
Why did you fashion me in this soft mould?
Give me these lengths of silky hair? these hands
Too delicately dimpled! and these arms
Too white, too weak! yet leave the man's heart in me,
To mar your masterpiece—that I should perish,
Who else had won renown among my peers,
A man, with men—perchance a god with you,
Had you but better sex'd me, you blind Gods!
But, as for man, all things are fitting to him.
He strikes his fellow 'mid the clanging shields,
And leaps among the smoking walls, and takes
Some long-hair'd virgin wailing at the shrines,
Her brethren having fallen; and you Gods
Commend him, crown him, grant him ample days,
And dying honour, and an endless peace
Among the deep Elysian asphodels.
O fate, to be a woman! To be led
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,
And be a slave, tho' bred in palaces,
And be a fool, tho' seated with the wise—
A poor and pitiful fool, as I am now,
Loving and hating my vain life away!

CHORUS.

These flowers—we pluck'd them
At morning, and took them
From bright bees that suck'd them
And warm winds that shook them
Neath blue hills that o'erlook them.

SEMI-CHORUS.

With the dews of the meadow
Our rosy warm fingers
Sparkle yet, and the shadow
Of the summer-cloud lingers
In the hair of us singers.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Ere these buds on our altars
Fade; ere the forkt fire,
Fed with pure honey falters,
And fails; louder, higher
Raise the Pæan.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Draw nigher,
Stand closer! First praise we
The Father of all.
To him the song raise we.
Over Heaven's golden wall
Let it fall! Let it fall!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then Apollo, the king of
The lyre and the bow;
Who taught us to sing of
The deeds that we know—
Deeds well done long ago.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Next, of all the Immortals,

Athenë's gray eyes;
Who sits throned in our portals,
Ever fair, ever wise.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Neither dare we despise
To extol the great Herë.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

And then,
As is due, shall our song
Be of those among men
Who were brave, who were strong,
Who endured.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the wrong
Of the Phrygian: and Ilion's false sons:
And Scamander's wild wave
Thro' the bleak plain that runs.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the death of the brave.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Last, of whom the Gods save
For new honours: of them none
So good or so great
As our chief Agamemnon
The crown of our State.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, true hearts, rejoice with me! This day
Shall crown the hope of ten uncertain years!

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes--and yet—O Heaven preserve us all!
My heart is weak—there's One he brings not back;
Who went with him; who will not come again;
Whom we shall never see!—

CHORUS.

O Queen, for whom,
Lamenting thus, is your great heart cast down?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The earliest loved—the early lost! my child—

CHORUS.

Iphigenia?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She—my child—

CHORUS.

—Alas!
That was a terrible necessity!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Was it necessity? O pardon, friends,
But in the dark, unsolaced solitude,
Wild thoughts come to me, and perplex my heart.
This, which you call a dread necessity,
Was it a murder or a sacrifice?

CHORUS.

It was a God that did decree the death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis through the heart the Gods do speak to us.
High instincts are the oracles of heaven.
Did ever heart--did ever God, before,
Suggest such foul infanticidal lie?

CHORUS.

Be comforted! The universal good
Needed this single, individual loss.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can all men's good be helped by one man's crime?

CHORUS.

He loosed the Greeks from Aulis by that deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O casual argument! Who gave the Greeks
Such bloody claim upon a virgin's life?
Shall the pure bleed to purge impurity?
A hundred Helens were not worth that death!
What! had the manhood of combinëd Greece,
Whose boast was in its untamed strength, no help
Better than the spilt blood of one poor girl?
Or, if it were of need that blood should flow,
What God ordain'd him executioner?
Was it for him the Armament was plann'd?
For him that angry Greece was leagued in war?
For him, or Menelaus, was this done?
Was the cause his, or Menelaus' cause?
Was he less sire than Menelaus was?
He, too, had children; did he murder them?
O, was it manlike? was it human, even?

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! it was an evil thing.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, if any one among you all,
If any be a mother, bear with me!
She was my earliest born, my best beloved.
The painful labour of that perilous birth
That gave her life did almost take my own.
He had no pain. He did not bring her forth.
How should he, therefore, love her as I loved?

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alas! Our tears run down with yours.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, who shall say with what delicious tears,
With what ineffable tenderness, while he
Took his blithe pastime on the windy plain,
Among the ringing camps, and neighing steeds,
First of his glad compeers, I sat apart,
Silent, within the solitary house:
Rocking the little child upon my breast;
And soothed its soft eyes into sleep with song!

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! unhappy, sad, unchilded one!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, when I taught, from inarticulate sounds,
The little, lisping, lips to breathe his name.
Now they will never breathe that name again!

CHORUS.

Alas! for Hades has not any hope,
Since Thracian women lopp'd the tuneful head
Of Orpheus, and Heracleus is no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, spread in prayer the helpless, infant hands,
That they, too, might invoke the Gods for him.
Alas, who now invokes the Gods for her?
Unwedded, hapless, gone to glut the womb
Of dark, untimely Orcus!

CHORUS.

Ai! alas!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I would have died, if that could be, for her!

When life is half-way set to feeble eld,
And memory more than hope, and to dim eyes
The gorgeous tapestry of existence shows
Moth'd, finger'd, fray'd, and bare, 'twere not so hard
To fling away this ravell'd skein of life,
Which else, a little later, Fate had cut.
And who would sorrow for the o'erblown rose
Sharp winter strews about its own bleak thorns?
But, cropp'd before the time, to fall so young!
And wither in the gloomy crown of Dis!
Never to look upon the blessed sun—

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alinon! woe is me, this grief
Strikes pity paralyzed. All words are weak!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And I had dreamed such splendid dreams for her!
Who would not so for Agamemnon's child?
For we had hoped that she, too, in her time
Would be the mother of heroic men!

CHORUS.

There rises in my heart an awful fear,
Lest from these evils darker evils come;
For heaven exacts, for wrong, the uttermost tear,
And death hath language after life is dumb!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It works! it works!

CHORUS.

Look, some one comes this way.

HERALD.

O Honour of the House of Tantalus!
The king's wheels echo in the brazen gates.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Our heart is half-way there, to welcome him.

How looks he? Well? And all our long-lost friends—
Their faces grow before me! Lead the way
Where we may meet them. All our haste seems slow.

CHORUS.

Would that he brought his dead child back with him!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now let him come. The mischief works apace!

X. CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The winds were lull'd in Aulis; and the day,
Down-sloped, was loitering to the lazy west.
There was no motion of the glassy bay,
But all things by a heavy light opprest.
Windless, cut off upon the destined way—
Dark shrouds, distinct against the lurid lull—
Dark ropes hung useless, loose, from mast to hull—
The black ships lay abreast.
Not any cloud would cross the brooding skies.
The distant sea boom'd faintly. Nothing more.
They walked about upon the yellow shore;
Or, lying listless, huddled groups supine,
With faces turn'd toward the flat sea-spine,
They plann'd the Phrygian battle o'er, and o'er;
Till each grew sullen, and would talk no more,
But sat, dumb-dreaming. Then would some one rise,
And look toward the hollow hulls, with haggard, hopeless eyes—
Wild eyes—and, crowding round, yet wilder eyes—
And gaping, languid lips;
And everywhere that men could see,

About the black, black ships,
Was nothing but the deep-red sea;
The deep-red shore;
The deep-red skies;
The deep-red silence, thick with thirsty sighs;
And daylight, dying slowly. Nothing more.
The tall masts stood upright;
And not a sail above the burnish'd prores;
The languid sea, like one outwearied quite,
Shrank, dying inward into hollow shores,
And breathless harbours, under sandy bars;
And, one by one, down tracts of quivering blue,
The singed and sultry stars
Look'd from the inmost heaven, far, faint, and few,
While, all below, the sick, and steaming brine
The spill'd-out sunset did incarnadine.

At last one broke the silence; and a word
Was lisp'd and buzz'd about, from mouth to mouth;
Pale faces grew more pale; wild whispers stirr'd;
And men, with moody, murmuring lips, conferr'd
In ominous tones, from shaggy beards uncouth:
As tho' some wind had broken from the blurr'd
And blazing prison of the stagnant drouth,
And stirr'd the salt sea in the stifled south.
The long-robed priests stood round; and, in the gloom,
Under black brows, their bright and greedy eyes
Shone deathfully; there was a sound of sighs,
Thick-sobb'd from choking throats among the crowd,
That, whispering, gather'd close, with dark heads bow'd;
But no man lifted up his voice aloud,
For heavy hung o'er all the helpless sense of doom.

Then, after solemn prayer,
The father bade the attendants, tenderly
Lift her upon the lurid altar-stone.

There was no hope in any face; each eye
Swam tearful, that her own did gaze upon.
They bound her helpless hands with mournful care;
And loop'd up her long hair,
That hung about her, like an amber shower,
Mix'd with the saffron robe, and falling lower,
Down from her bare, and cold, white shoulder flung.
Upon the heaving breast the pale cheek hung,
Suffused with that wild light that roll'd among
The pausing crowd, out of the crimson drouth.
They held hot hands upon her pleading mouth;
And stifled on faint lips the natural cry.
Back from the altar-stone,
Slow-moving in his fixed place
A little space,
The speechless father turn'd. No word was said.
He wrapp'd his mantle close about his face,
In his dumb grief, without a moan.
The lopping axe was lifted overhead.
Then, suddenly,
There sounded a strange motion of the sea,
Booming far inland; and above the east
A ragged cloud rose slowly, and increas'd.
Not one line in the horoscope of Time
Is perfect. Oh, what falling off is this,
When some grand soul, that else had been sublime,
Falls unawares amiss,
And stoops its crested strength to sudden crime!

So gracious a thing is it, and sweet,
In life's clear centre one true man to see,
That holds strong nature in a wise control;
Throbbing out, all round, the heat
Of a large, and liberal soul.
No shadow, simulating life,
But pulses warm with human nature,
In a soul of godlike stature;
Heart, and brain, all rich and rife
With noble instincts; strong to meet
Time calmly, in his purposed place.

Sound thro' and thro', and all complete;
Exalting what is low, and base;
Enlarging what is narrow, and small;
He stamps his character on all,
And with his grand identity
Fills up Creation's eye.
He will not dream the aimless years away
In blank delay,
But makes eternity of to-day,
And reaps the full-ear'd time. For him
Nature her affluent horn doth brim,
To strew with fruit and flowers his way—
Fruits ripe, and flowers gay.

The clear soul in his earnest eyes
Looks thro' and thro' all plaited lies,
Time shall not rob him of his youth,
Nor narrow his large sympathies.
He is not true, he is a truth,
And such a truth as never dies.
Who knows his nature, feels his right,
And, toiling, toils for his delight;
Not as slaves toil: where'er he goes,
The desert blossoms with the rose.
He trusts himself in scorn of doubt,
And lets orb'd purpose widen out.
The world works with him; all men see
Some part of them fulfill'd in him;
His memory never shall grow dim;
He holds the heaven and earth in fee,
Not following that, fulfilling this,
He is immortal, for he is!

O weep! weep! weep!
Weep for the young that die;
As it were pale flowers that wither under
The smiting sun, and fall asunder,
Before the dews on the grass are dry,
Or the tender twilight is out of the sky,

Or the lilies have fall'n asleep;
Or ships by a wanton wind cut short
Are wreck'd in sight of the placid port:
Sinkng strangely, and suddenly—
Sadly, and strangely, and suddenly—
Into the black Plutonian deep.
O weep! weep! weep!
Weep, and bow the head,
For those whose sun is set at noon;
Whose night is dark, without a moon:
Whose aim of life is sped
Beyond pursuing woes,
And the arrow of angry foes,
To the darkness that no man knows—
The darkness among the dead.
Let us mourn, and bow the head,
And lift up the voice, and weep
For the early dead!
For the early dead we may bow the head,
And strike the breast, and weep;
But, oh, what shall be said
For the living sorrow?
For the living sorrow our grief—
Dumb grief—draws no relief
From tears, nor yet may borrow
Solace from sound, or speech;—
For the living sorrow
That heaps to-morrow upon to-morrow
In piled up pain, beyond Hope's reach!
It is well that we mourn for the early dead,
Strike the breast, and bow the head;
For the sorrow for these may be sung, or said,
And the chaplets be woven for the fall'n head,
And the urns to the stately tombs be led,
And Love from their memory may be fed,
And song may ennoble the anguish;
But, oh, for the living sorrow—
For the living sorrow what hopes remain?
For the prison'd, pining, passionate pain,

That is doom'd forever to languish,
And to languish forever in vain,
For the want of the words that may bestead
The hunger that out of loss is bred.
O friends, for the living sorrow—
For the living sorrow—
For the living sorrow what shall be said?

XI. A PHOCIAN. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS.

PHOCIAN.

O noble strangers, if indeed you be
Such as you seem, of Argos, and the land
That the unconquer'd Agamemnon rules,
Tell me is this the palace, these the roofs
Of the Atridæ, famed in ancient song?

CHORUS.

Not without truth you name the neighbourhood,
Standing before the threshold, and the doors
Of Pelops, and upon the Argive soil.
That which you see above the Agora
Is the old fane of the Lycæan God,
And this the house of Agamemnon's queen.
But whence art thou? For if thy dusty locks,
And those soil'd sandals show with aught of truth,
Thou shouldst be come from far.

PHOCIAN.

And am so, friends,
But, by Heaven's favour, here my journey ends.

CHORUS.

Whence, then, thy way?

PHOCIAN.

From Phocis; charged with gifts
For Agamemnon, and with messages
From Strophius, and the sister of your king.

Our watchmen saw the beacon on the hills,
And leap'd for joy. Say, is the king yet come?

CHORUS.

He comes this way; stand by, I hear them shout.
Here shall you meet him, as he mounts the hill.

PHOCIAN.

Now blest be all the Gods, from Father Zeus,
Who reigns o'er windy Œta, far away,
To King Apollo, with the golden horns.

CHORUS.

Look how they cling about him! Far, and near,
The town breaks loose, and follows after,
Crowding up the ringing ways.
The boy forgets to watch the steer;
The grazing steer forgets to graze;
The shepherd leaves the herd;
The priest will leave the fane;
The deep heart of the land is stirr'd
To sunny tears, and tearful laughter,
To look into his face again.

Burst, burst the brazen gates?
Throw open the hearths, and follow!
Let the shouts of the youths go up to Apollo,
Lord of the graceful quiver:
Till the tingling sky dilates—
Dilates, and palpitates;
And, Pæan! Pæan! the virgins sing;
Pæan! Pæan! the king! the king!
Laden with spoils from Phrygia!
Io! Io! Io! they sing
Till the pillars of Olympus ring;
Io! to Queen Ortygia,
Whose double torch shall burn forever!
But thou, O Lord of the graceful quiver,
Bid, bid thy Pythian splendour halt,

Where'er he beams, surpassing sight;
Or on some ocean isthmus bent,
Or wheel'd from the dark continent,
Half-way down Heaven's rosy vault,
Toward the dewy cone of night.
Let not the breathless air grow dim,
Until the whole land look at him!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand back!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Will he come this way?

SEMI-CHORUS.

No; by us.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Gods, what a crowd!

SEMI-CHORUS.

How firm the old men walk!

SEMI-CHORUS.

There goes the king. I know him by his beard.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And I, too, by the manner of his gait.
That God-like spirit lifts him from the earth.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How gray he looks!

SEMI-CHORUS.

His cheek is seam'd with scars.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a bull's front!

SEMI-CHORUS.

He stands up like a tower.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, like some moving tower of armëd men,
That carries conquest under city-walls.

SEMI-CHORUS.

He lifts his sublime head, and in his port
Bears eminent authority.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Behold,
His spear shows like the spindle of a Fate!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Oh, what an arm!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Most fit for such a sword;
Look at that sword.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What shoulders!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a throat!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What are these bearing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Urns.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Alas! alas!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O friends, look here! how are the mighty men

Shrunk up into a little vase of earth,
A child might lift. Sheath'd each in brazen plates,
They went so heavy, they come back so light,
Sheath'd, each one, in the brazen urn of death !

SEMI-CHORUS.

With what a stateliness he moves along !

SEMI-CHORUS.

See, how they touch his skirt, and grasp his hand !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Is that the queen ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, how she matches him !
With what grand eyes she looks up, full in his !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Say, what are these ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

O Phrygians ! how they walk !
The only sad men in the crowd, I think.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But who is this, that with such scornful brows,
And looks averted, walks among the rest ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

I know not, but some Phrygian woman, sure.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her heavy-fallen hair down her white neck
(A dying sunbeam tangled in each tress)
All its neglected beauty pours one way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her looks bend ever on the alien ground

As tho' the stones of Troy were in her path.
And in the painëd paleness of her brow
Sorrow hath made a regal tenement.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Here comes Electra; young Orestes, too;
See how he emulates his father's stride!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Ægisthus, where he walks apart,
And bites his lip.

SEMI-CHORUS.

I oft have seen him so
When something chafes him in his bitter moods.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace, here they come!

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King!

XII. AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CASSANDRA, A PHOCIAN, CHORUS, SEMI-CHORUS, *and others in the procession.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O blazing sun, that in thy skyey tower
Pausest to see one kingly as thyself,
Lend all thy brightest beams to light his head,
And gild our gladness! Friends, behold the King!
Now hath Ætolian Jove, the arbiter
Of conquests, well disposed the issues here;
For every night that brought not news from Troy
Heap'd fear on fear, as waves succeed to waves,
When Northern blasts blow white the Cretan main—
Knowing that thou, far off, from toil to toil
Climbedst, uncertain. Unto such an one

His children, and young offspring of the house
Are as a field, which he, the husbandman,
Owning far off, does only look upon
At seed time once, nor then till harvest comes;
And his sad wife must wet with nightly tears
Unsolaced pillows, fearing for his fate.
To these how welcome, then, his glad return,
When he, as thou, comes heavy with the weight
Of great achievements, and the spoils of time.

AGAMEMNON.

Enough! enough! we weigh you at full worth,
And hold you dear, whose gladness equals yours;
But women ever err by over-talk.
Silence to women, as the beard to men,
Brings honour; and plain truth is hurt, not help'd
By many words. To each his separate sphere
The Gods allot. To me the sounding camp,
Steeds, and the oaken spear; to you the hearth,
Children, and household duties of the loom.
'Tis man's to win an honourable name;
Woman's to keep it honourable still.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

(O beast! O weakness of this womanhood!
To let these pompous male things strut in our eyes,
And in their lordship lap themselves secure,
Because the lots in life are fallen to them.
Am I less heart and head, less blood and brain,
Less force and feeling, pulse and passion—I—
Than this self-worshipper—a lie all thro'?)
Forgive if joy too long unloose our lips,
Silent so long: your words fall on my soul
As rain on thirsty lands, that feeds the dearth
With blessed nourishment. My whole heart hears.
You speaking thus, I would be silent ever.

AGAMEMNON.

Who is this man?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A Phocian, by his look.

PHOCIAN.

O King, from Strophius, and your sister's court,
Despatch'd with this seal'd tablet, and with gifts;
Tho' both express, so says my royal Head,
But poorly the rich welcome they intend.
Will you see this?—and these?

AGAMEMNON.

Anon! anon!
We'll look at them within. O child, thine eyes
Look warmer welcome than all words express.
Thou art mine own child by that royal brow.
Nature hath mark'd thee mine.

ELECTRA.

O Father!

AGAMEMNON.

Come!
And our Orestes! He is nobly grown;
He shall do great deeds when our own are dim.
So shall men come to say "the father's sword
In the son's hands hath hewn out nobler fame."
Think of it, little one! where is our cousin?

ÆGISTHUS.

Here! And the keys of the Acropolis?

AGAMEMNON.

O well! this dust and heat are over much.
And, cousin, you look pale. Anon! anon!
Speak to us by and bye. Let business wait.
Is our house order'd? we will take the bath.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Will you within ? where all is order'd fair
Befitting state : cool chambers, marble-floor'd
Or piled with blazing carpets, scented rare
With the sweet spirit of each odorous gum
In dim, delicious, amorous mists about
The purple-paven, silver-sided bath,
Deep, flashing, pure.

AGAMEMNON.

Look to our captives then.
I charge you chiefly with this woman here,
Cassandra, the mad prophetess of Troy.
See that you chafe her not in her wild moods.

XIII. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Linger not !

ÆGISTHUS.

What ? you will to-day—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

—This hour.

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, if some chance mar all !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We'll make chance sure.
Doubt is the doomsman of self-judged disgrace :
But every chance brings safety to self-help.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ay, but the means—the time—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

—Fulfil themselves.
O most irresolute heart! is this a time
When thro' the awful pause of life, distinct,
The sounding shears of Fate slope near, to stand
Meek, like tame wethers, and be shorn? How say you,
The blithe wind up, and the broad sea before him,
Who would crouch all day long beside the mast
Counting the surges beat his idle helm,
Because between him and the golden isles
The shadow of a passing storm might hang?
Danger, being pregnant, doth beget resolve.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou wert not born to fail. Give me thy hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Take it.

ÆGISTHUS.

It does not tremble.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O be strong!
The future hangs upon the die we cast:
Fortune plays high for us—

ÆGISTHUS.

Gods grant she win!

XIV. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CASSANDRA.

CHORUS.

O thou that dost with globëd glory
Sweep the dark world at noon of night,
Or among snowy summits, wild, and hoary,

Or thro' the mighty silences
Of immemorial seas,
With all the stars behind thee flying white,
O take with thee, where'er
Thou wanderest, ancient Care,
And hide her in some interlunar haunt;
Where but the wild bird's chaunt
At night, thro' rocky ridges gaunt,
Or moanings of some homeless sea may find her.
There, Goddess, bar, and bind her;
Where she may pine, but wander not;
Loathe her haunts, but leave them not;
Wail and rave to the wind and wave
That hear, yet understand her not;
And curse her chains, yet cleave them not;
And hate her lot, yet help it not.
Or let her rove with Gods undone
Who dwell below the setting sun,
And the sad western hours
That burn in fiery bowers;
Or in Amphitritë's grot
Where the vexëd tides unite,
And the spent wind, howling, breaks
O'er sullen oceans out of sight
Among sea-snakes, that the white moon wakes
Till they shake themselves into diamond flakes,
Coil and twine in the glittering brine
And swing themselves in the long moonshine;
Or by wild shores hoarsely rage,
And moan, and vent her spite,
In some inhospitable harbourage
Of Thracian waters, white.
There let her grieve, and grieve, and hold her breath
Until she hate herself to death.
I seem with rapture lifted higher,
Like one in mystic trance.
O Pan! Pan! Pan!
First friend of man,

And founder of Heaven's choir,
Come thou from old Cyllenë, and inspire
The Gnossian, and Nysæan dance!
Come thou, too, Delian king,
From the blue Ægean sea,
And Mycone's yellow coast:
Give my spirit such a wing
As there the foolish Icarus lost,
That she may soar above the cope
Of this high pinnacle of gladness,
And dizzy height of hope;
And there, beyond all reach of sadness,
May tune my lips to sing
Great Pæans, full, and free,
Till the whole world ring
With such heart-melting madness
As bards are taught by thee!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to the sad Cassandra, how she stands!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She turns not from the wringing of her hands.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What is she doing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, her lips are moved!

SEMI-CHORUS.

And yet their motion shapes not any sound.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Speak to her.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She will heed not.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But yet speak.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, cease a little while
From mourning. Recognize the work of Heaven.
Troy smoulders. Think not of it. Let the past
Be buried in the past. Tears mend it not.
Fate may be kindlier, yet, than she appears.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She does not answer.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Call to her again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O break this scornful silence! Hear us speak.
We would console you.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, how she is moved!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O speak! the heart's hurt oft is help'd by words.

CASSANDRA.

O Itys! Itys! Itys!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a shriek!
She takes the language of the nightingale,
Unhappy bird! that mourns her perish'd form,
And leans her breast against a thorn, all night.

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the shambles.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Listen, friends!
She mutters something to herself.

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Did any name Apollo? woe is me!

SEMI CHORUS.

She calls upon the God.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy one,
What sorrow strikes thee with bewilderment?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now she is mute again.

CHORUS.

A Stygian cold
Creeps thro' my limbs, and loosens every joint.
The hot blood freezes in its arteries,
And stagnates round the region of the heart.
A cloud comes up from sooty Acheron,
And clothes mine eyelids
With infernal night.
My hair stands up.
What supernatural awe
Shoots, shrivelling thro' me,
To the marrow, and bone?
O dread, and wise Prophetic Powers,
Whose strong-compelling law
Doth hold in awe
The labouring hours,
Your intervention I invoke,
My soul from this wild doubt to save;
Whether you have
Your dwelling in some dark, oracular cave,

Or solemn, sacred oak;
Or in Dodona's ancient, honour'd beech,
Whose mystic boughs above
Sat the wise dove;
Or if the tuneful voice of old
Awake in Delos, to unfold
Dark wisdom in ambiguous speech.
Upon the verge of strange despair
My heart grows dizzy. Now I seem
Like one that dreams some ghastly dream,
And cannot cast away his care,
But harrows all the haggard air
With his hard breath. Above, beneath,
The empty silence seems to teem
With apprehension. O declare
What hidden thing doth Fate prepare,
What hidden, horrible thing doth Fate prepare?
For of some hidden grief my heart seems half aware.

XV. CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

One blow makes all sure. Ay, but then—beyond?
I cannot trammel up the future thus,
And so forecast the time, as with one blow
To break the hundred Hydra-heads of Chance.
Beyond—beyond I dare not look, for who,
If first he scann'd the space, would leap the gulf?
One blow secures the moment. Oh, but he . . . .
Ay, there it lies! I dread lest my love, being
So much the stronger, scare his own to death;
As what they comprehend not, men abhor.
He has a wavering nature, easily
Unpoised; and trembling ever on extremes.
Oh, what if terror outweigh love, and love,
Having defiled his countenance, take part

Against himself, self-loathed, a fallen God?
Ah, his was never yet the loving soul,
But rather that which lets itself be loved;
As some loose lily leans upon a lake,
Letting the lymph reflect it, as it will,
Still idly sway'd, whichever way the stream
Stirs the green tangles of the water moss.
The flower of his love never bloom'd upright,
But a sweet parasite, that loved to lean
On stronger natures, winning strength from them—
Not such a flower as whose delirious cup
Maddens the bee, and never can give forth
Enough of fragrance, yet is ever sweet.
Yet which is sweetest—to receive or give?
Sweet to receive, and sweet to give, in love!
When one is never sated that receives,
Nor ever all exhausted one that gives.
I think I love him more, that I resemble
So little aught that pleases me in him.
Perchance, if I dared question this dark heart,
'Tis not for him, but for myself in him,
For that which is my softer self in him—
I have done this, and this—and shall do more:
Hoped, wept, dared wildly, and will overcome!
Does he not need me? It is sweet to think
That I am all to him, whate'er I be
To others; and to one—little, I know!
But to him, all things—sceptre, sword, and crown!
For who would live, but to be loved by some one?
Be fair, but to give beauty to another?
Or wise, but to instruct some sweet desire?
Or strong, but that thereby love may rejoice?
Or who for crime's sake would be criminal?
And yet for love's sake would not dare wild deeds?
A mutual necessity, one fear,
One hope, and the strange posture of the time
Unite us now;—but this need over-past,
Oh, if, 'twixt his embrace and mine, there rise
The reflex of a murder'd head! and he,

Remembering the crime, remember not
It was for him that I am criminal,
But rather hate me for the part he took—
Against his soul, as he will say—in this ?—
I will not think it. Upon this wild venture,
Freighted with love's last wealthiest merchandise,
My heart sets forth. To-morrow I shall wake
A beggar, as it may be, or thrice rich.
As one who plucks his last gem from his crown
(Some pearl for which, in youth, he barter'd states),
And, sacrificing with an anxious heart,
Toward night puts seaward in a little bark
For lands reported far beyond the sun,
Trusting to win back kingdoms, or there drown—
So I—and with like perilous endeavour!
Oh, but I think I could implore the Gods
More fervently than ever, in my youth,
I pray'd that help of Heaven I needed not,
And lifted innocent hands to their great sky.
So much to lose . . . so much to gain . . . so much . . .
I dare not think how . . . .
Ha, the Phrygian slave!
He dares to bring his mistress to the hearth!
She looks unhappy. I will speak to her.
Perchance her hatred may approve my own,
And help me in the work I am about.
'Twere well to sound her.
Be not so cast down,
Unhappy stranger! Fear no jealous hand.
In sorrow I, too, am not all untried.
Our fortunes are not so dissimilar,
Slaves both—and of one master.
Nay, approach!
Is my voice harsh in its appeal to thee ?
If so, believe me, it belies my heart.
A woman speaks to thee.
What, silent still ?
O look not on me with such sullen eyes,
There is no accusation in my own.

Rather on him that brought thee, than on thee,
Our scorn is settled. I would help thee. Come!
Mute still?
I know that shame is ever dumb,
And ever weak; but here is no reproach.
Listen! Thy fate is given to thy hands.
Art thou a woman, and dost scorn contempt?
Art thou a captive, and dost loathe these bonds?
Art thou courageous, as men call thy race?
Or, helpless art thou, and wouldst overcome?
If so—look up! For there is hope for thee.
Give me thy hand—

CASSANDRA.

Pah! there is blood on it!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What is she raving of?

CASSANDRA.

The place, from old,
Is evil.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, there is a sickness, here,
That needs the knife.

CASSANDRA.

Oh, horrible! blood! blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I see you are a Phrygian to the bone!
Coward, and slave! be so for evermore!

CASSANDRA.

Apollo! O Apollo! O blood! blood!
The whole place swims with it! The slippery steps
Steam with the fumes! The rank air smells of
blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heed her not! for she knows not what she says.
This is some falling sickness of the soul.
Her fever frights itself.

CASSANDRA.

It reeks! it reeks!
It smokes! it stifles! blood! blood, everywhere!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

See, he hath brought this mad woman from Troy,
To shame our honour, and insult our care.
Look to her, friends, my hands have other work!

CHORUS.

Alas, the House of Tantalus is doom'd!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The King sleeps—like an infant. His huge strength
Holds slumber thrice as close as other men.
How well he sleeps! Make garlands for the Gods.
I go to watch the couch. Cull every flower,
And honour all the tutelary fanes
With sacrifice as ample as our joy,
Lest some one say we reverence not the Gods!

CHORUS.

O doomëd House and race!
O toilsome, toilsome horsemanship
Of Pelops; that ill omen brought to us!
For since the drownéd Myrtilus
Did from his golden chariot slip
To his last sleep, below the deep,
Nothing of sad calamitous disgrace
Hath angry Heaven ceased to heap
On this unhappy House of Tantalus.

Not only upon sacred leaves of old,
Preserved in many a guarded, mystic fold,
But sometimes, too, enroll'd
On tablets fair
Of stone, or brass, with quaint and curious care,
In characters of gold,
And many an iron-bound, melancholy book,
The wisdom of the wise is writ;
And hardly shall a man,
For all he can,
By painful, slow degrees,
And nightly reveries
Of long, laborious thought, grow learn'd in these.
But who, that reads a woman's wily look,
Shall say what evil hides, and lurks in it?
Or fathom her false wit?
For by a woman fell the man
Who did Nemæa's pest destroy,
And the brinded Hydra slew,
And many other wonders wrought.
By a woman, fated Troy
Was overset, and fell to nought.
Royal Amphiaraus, too,
All his wisdom could not free
From his false Eriphyle,
Whom a golden necklace bought—
So has it been, and so shall be,
Ever since the world began!

O woman, woman, of what other earth
Hath dædal Nature moulded thee?
Thou art not of our clay compact,
Not of our common clay;—
But when the painful world in labour lay—
Labour long—and agony,
In her heaving throes distract,
And vext with angry Heaven's red ire,
Nature, kneading snow and fire,
In thy mystic being pent

Each contrary element.
Life and death within thee blent:
All despair and all desire:
There to mingle and ferment.
While, mad midwives, at thy birth,
Furies mixt with Sirens bent,
Inter-wreathing snakes and smiles—
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles!

Such a splendid mischief thou!
With thy light of languid eyes:
And thy bosom of pure snow:
And thine heart of fire below,
Whose red light doth come and go
Ever o'er thy changeful cheek
When love-whispers tremble weak:
Thy warm lips and pensive sighs,
That the breathless spirit bow:
And the heavenward life that lies
In the still serenities
Of thy snowy, airy brow—
Thine ethereal airy brow.
Such a splendid mischief, thou!
What are all thy witcheries?
All thine evil beauty? All
Thy soft looks, and subtle smiles?
Tangled tresses? Mad caresses
Tendernesses? tears and kisses?
And the long look, between whiles
That the helpless heart beguiles,
Tranced in such a subtle thrall?
What are all thy sighs and smiles?
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles!
Hoofs to horses, teeth to lions,
Horns to bulls, and speed to hares,
To the fish to glide thro' waters,
To the bird to glide thro' airs,
Nature gave: to men gave courage,
And the use of brazen spears.

What was left to give to woman,
All her gifts thus given? Ah, tears,
Smiles, and kisses, whispers, glances,
Only these; and merely beauty
On her archëd brows unfurl'd.
And with these she shatters lances,
All unarm'd binds armëd Duty,
And in triumph drags the world!

XVI. SEMI-CHORUS. CHORUS. CASSANDRA. AGAMEMNON. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Break off, break off! It seems I heard a cry!

CHORUS.

Surely one call'd within the house.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand by.

CHORUS.

The Prophetess is troubled. Look, her eye
Rolls fearfully.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now all is husht once more.

CHORUS.

I hear the feet of some one at the door.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Murdress! oh, oh!

SEMI-CHORUS.

The house is fill'd with shrieks.

CHORUS.

The sound deceives or that was the King's voice.

SEMI-CHORUS.

The voice of Agamemnon!

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Ai! ai! ai!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the toils.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

I will not die!

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

O Zeus! he will escape!

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

He has it.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Ai! ai!

CHORUS.

Some hideous deed is being done within.
Burst in the doors!

SEMI-CHORUS.

I cannot open them.
Barr'd, barr'd within!

CASSANDRA.

The axe is at the bull!

CHORUS.

Call the elders.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And the People. O Argives! Argives!
Alinon! Alinon!

CHORUS.

You to the Agora.

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples we.

CHORUS.

Hearken, O maidens!

SEMI-CHORUS.

This way.

CHORUS.

That way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Quick! quick!

CASSANDRA.

Seal my sight, O Apollo! O Apollo!

CHORUS.

To the Agora!

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples!

CHORUS.

Haste! haste!

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Stabb'd, oh!

CHORUS.

Too late!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is bellowing.

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

Thrust there again :

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

One blow has done it all.

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

Is it quite thro' ?

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

He will not move again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O Heaven, and Earth ! My heart stands still with awe !
Where will this murder end ?

CHORUS.

Hold ! some one comes !

XVII. ELECTRA. ORESTES. CHORUS. A PHOCIAN.

(ELECTRA *leading* ORESTES.)

Save us ! save him—Orestes !

CHORUS.

What has fall'n ?

ELECTRA.

An evil thing. Oh, we are fatherless !

CHORUS.

Ill-starr'd Electra ! But how fell this chance ?

ELECTRA.

Here is no time for words—scarce time for flight.
When from his royal bath the King would rise—
That devilish woman, lying long in lurk,

Behind him crept, with stealthy feet unheard,
And flung o'er all his limbs a subtle web.
Caught in the craft of whose contrivëd folds,
Stumbling, he fell. Ægisthus seized a sword;
But halted, half irresolute to strike.
My father, like a lion in the toils,
Upheaved his head, and, writhing, roar'd with wrath,
And angry shame at this infernal snare.
Almost he rent the blinding nets atwain.
But Clytemnestra on him flung herself,
And caught the steel, and smit him through the ribs.
He slipp'd, and reel'd. She drove the weapon thro',
Piercing the heart!

CHORUS.

O woe! what tale is this?

ELECTRA.

I, too, with him, had died, but for this child,
And that high vengeance which is yet to be.

CHORUS.

Alas! then Agamemnon is no more,
Who stood, but now, amongst us, full of life,
Crown'd with achieving years! The roof, and cope
Of honour, fall'n! Where shall we lift our eyes?
Where set renown? Where garner up our hopes?
All worth is dying out. The land is dark,
And Treason looks abroad in the eclipse.
He did not die the death of men that live
Such life as he lived, fall'n among his peers,
Whom the red battle roll'd away, while yet
The shout of Gods was ringing thro' and thro' them;
But Death that fear'd to front him in full field,

Lurk'd by the hearth and smote him from behind.
A mighty man is gone. A mighty grief
Remains. And rumour of undying deeds
For song, and legend, to the end of time!
What tower is strong?

ELECTRA.

O friends—if friends you be—
For who shall say where falsehood festers not,
Those being falsest, who should most be true?
Where is that Phocian? Let him take the boy,
And bear him with him to his master's court.
Else will Ægisthus slay him.

CHORUS.

Orphan'd one,
Fear you not?

ORESTES.

I am Agamemnon's son.

CHORUS.

Therefore should'st fear—

ORESTES.

And therefore cannot fear.

PHOCIAN.

I heard a cry. Did any call?

CHORUS.

Oh, well!
You happen this way in the need of time.

ELECTRA.

O loyal stranger, Agamemnon's child
Is fatherless. This boy appeals to you.
O save him, save him from his father's foes!

PHOCIAN.

Unhappy lady, what wild words are these?

ELECTRA.

The house runs blood. Ægisthus, like a fiend,
Is raging loose, his weapon dripping gore.

CHORUS.

The king is dead.

PHOCIAN.

Is dead!

ELECTRA.

Dead.

PHOCIAN.

Do I dream?

ELECTRA.

Such dreams are dreamed in hell—such dreams—
oh no?
Is not the earth as solid—heaven above—
The sun in heaven—and Nature at her work—
And men at theirs—the same? Oh, no! no
dream!
We shall not wake—nor he; tho' the Gods sleep!
Unnaturally murder'd—

PHOCIAN.

Murder'd!

ELECTRA.

Ay.
And the sun blackens not; the world is green;
The fires of the red west are not put out.
Is not the cricket singing in the grass?
And the shy lizard shooting thro' the leaves?

I hear the ox low in the labour'd field.
Those swallows build, and are as garrulous
High up i' the towers. Yet I speak the truth!
By heaven I speak the truth—

PHOCIAN.

Yet more, vouchsafe.
How died the king?

ELECTRA.

Oh, there shall be a time
For words hereafter. While we dally here,
Fate haunts, and hounds us. Friend, receive this boy.
Bear him to Strophius. All this tragedy
Relate as best you may; it beggars speech.
Tell him a tower of hope is fall'n this day—
A name in Greece—

PHOCIAN.

—But you—

ELECTRA.

Away! away!
Destruction posts apace, while we delay.

PHOCIAN.

Come then!

ELECTRA.

I dare not leave my father's hearth,
For who would then do honour to his urn?
It may be that my womanhood, and youth
May help me here. It may be I shall fall,
And mix my own with Agamemnon's blood.
No matter. On Orestes hangs the hope
Of all this House. Him save for better days,
And ripen'd vengeance.

PHOCIAN.

Noble-hearted one!
Come then, last offspring of this fated race.
The future calls thee!

ORESTES.

Sister! Sister!

ELECTRA.

Go!

ORESTES.

O Sister!

ELECTRA.

O my brother! . . . One last kiss—
One last long kiss—how I have loved thee, boy!
Was it for this I nourish'd thy young years
With stately tales, and legends of the gods?
For this? . . . How the past crowds upon me!
Ah—
Wilt thou recall, in lonely, lonely hours,
How once we sat together on still eves,
(Ah me!) and brooded on all serious themes
Of sweet, and high, and beautiful, and good,
That throng the ancient years. Alcmena's son,
And how his life went out in fire on Œta;
Or of that bright-hair'd wanderer after fame,
That brought the great gold-fleece across the sea,
And left a name in Colchis; or we spake
Of the wise Theseus, councils, kingdoms, thrones,
And laws in distant lands; or, later still,
Of the great leaguer set round Ilion,
And what heart-stirring tidings of the war
Bards brought to Hellas. But when I would breathe
Thy father's name, didst thou not grasp my hand,
And glorious deeds shone round us like the stars

That lit the dark world from a great way off,
And died up into heaven, among the Gods?

ORESTES.

Sister, O Sister!

ELECTRA.

Ah, too long we linger.
Away! away!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

CHORUS.

Heaven go with thee!
To Crissa points the hand of Destiny.

ELECTRA.

O boy, on thee Fate hangs an awful weight
Of retribution! Let thy father's ghost
Forever whisper in thine ear. Be strong.
About thee, yet unborn, thy mother wove
The mystic web of life in such-like form
That Agamemnon's spirit in thine eyes
Seems living yet. His seal is set on thee;
And Pelops' ivory shoulder marks thee his.
Thee, child, nor contests on the Isthmian plain,
Nor sacred apple, nor green laurel-leaf,
But graver deeds await. Forget not, son,
Whose blood, unwash'd, defiles thy mother's doors!

CHORUS.

O haste! I hear a sound within the house.

ELECTRA.

Farewell, then, son of Agamemnon!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

XVIII. ELECTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS.

ELECTRA.

Gone! gone! Ah saved! . . . Oh fool, thou missest,
here!

CHORUS.

Alas, Electra, whither wilt thou go?

ELECTRA.

Touch me not! Come not near me! Let me be!
For this day, which I hoped for, is not mine.

CHORUS.

See how she gathers round her all her robe,
And sits apart with grief. Oh, can it be
Great Agamemnon is among the shades?

ELECTRA.

Would I had grasp'd his skirt, and follow'd him!

CHORUS.

Alas! there is an eminence of joy,
Where Fate grows dizzy, being mounted there,
And so tilts over on the other side!

O fallen, O fallen
The tower, which stood so high!
Whose base, and girth were strong i' the earth,
Whose head was in the sky!
O fall'n that tower of noble power,
That fill'd up every eye!

He stood so sure, that noble tower!
To make secure, and fill with power,
From length to length, the land of Greece!
In whose strong bulwarks all men saw,
Garner'd on the lap of law,

For dearth, or danger, spears of war,
And harvest sheaves of peace!
O fall'n, O fall'n that lofty tower—
The loftiest tower in Greece!

His brows he lift above the noon,
Fill'd with the day, a noble tower!
Who took the sunshine, and the shower,
And flung them back in merry scorn.
Who now shall stand when tempests lower?
He was the first to catch the morn,
The last to see the moon.
O friends, he was a noble tower!
O friends, and fall'n so soon!

Ah, well! lament! lament!
His walls are rent, his bulwarks bent,
And stoop'd that crested eminence,
Which stood so high for our defence!
For our defence—to guard, and fence
From all alarm of hurt and harm,
The fulness of a land's content!
O fall'n away, fall'n at mid-day,
And set before the sun is down,
The highest height of our renown!

O overthrown, the ivory throne!
The spoils of war, the golden crown,
And chiefest honour of the state!
O mourn with me! what tower is free
From over-topping destiny?
What strength is strong to fate?
O mourn with me! when shall we see
Another such, so good, so great?
Another such, to guard the state?

ÆGISTHUS.

He should have staid to shout thro' Troy, or bellow
With bulls in Ida—

CHORUS.

Look! Ægisthus comes!
Like some lean tiger, having dipt in blood
His dripping fangs, and hot athirst for more.
His lurid eye-ball rolls, as tho' it swam
Thro' sanguine films. He staggers, drunk with rage
And crazy mischief.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hold! let no one stir!
I charge you, all of you, who hear me speak.
Where may the boy Orestes lie concealed?
I hold the life of each in gage for his.
If any know where now he hides from us,
Let him beware, not rendering true reply!

CHORUS.

The boy is fled—

ELECTRA.

—is saved!

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra here!
How mean you? What is this?

ELECTRA.

Enough is left
Of Agamemnon's blood to drown you in.

ÆGISTHUS.

You shall not trifle with me, by my beard!
There's peril in this pastime. Where's the boy?

ELECTRA.

Half-way to Phocis, Heaven helping him.

ÆGISTHUS.

By the black Styx!

ELECTRA.

Take not the oath of Gods,
Who art but half a man, blaspheming coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

But you, by Heaven, if this be a sword,
Shall not be any more—

ELECTRA.

A slave to thee,
Blundering bloodshedder, tho' thou boast thyself
As huge as Ossa piled on Pelion,
Or anything but that weak wretch thou art!
Oh, thou hast only half done thy black work!
Thou should'st have slain the young lion with the old.
Look that he come not back, and find himself
Ungiven food, and still the lion's share!

ÆGISTHUS.

Insolent! but I know to seal thy lips—

ELECTRA.

—For thou art only strong among the weak.
We know thou hast an aptitude for blood.
To take a woman's is an easy task,
And one well worthy thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, but for words!

ELECTRA.

Yet, could'st thou feed on all the noble blood
Of god-like generations on this earth,
It should not help thee to a hero's heart.

CHORUS.

O peace, Electra, but for pity's sake!

Heap not his madness to such dangerous heights.

ELECTRA.

I will speak out my heart's scorn, tho' I die.

ÆGISTHUS.

And thou shalt die, but not till I have tamed
That stubborn spirit to a wish for life.

CHORUS.

O cease, infatuate! I hear the Queen.

[*By a movement of the Eccyclema the palace is thrown open, and discovers* CLYTEMNESTRA *standing over the body of* AGAMEMNON.

XIX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS. ELECTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Argives! behold the man who was your King!

CHORUS.

Dead! dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not I, but Fate hath dealt this blow.

CHORUS.

Dead! dead, alas! look where he lies, O friends!
That noble head, and to be brought so low!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He who set light by woman, with blind scorn,
And held her with the beasts we sacrifice,
Lies, by a woman sacrificed himself.
This is high justice which appeals to you.

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! I know not words for this!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We are but as the instrument of heaven.
Our work is not design, but destiny.
A God directs the lightning to its fall;
It smites and slays, and passes other-where,
Pure in its self, as when, in light, it left
The bosom of Olympus, to its end.
In this cold heart the wrong of all the past
Lies buried. I avenged, and I forgive.
Honour him yet. He is a king, tho' fallen.

CHORUS.

Oh, how she sets Virtue's own crest on Crime,
And stands there stern as Fate's wild arbitress!
Not any deed could make her less than great.

*(*CLYTEMNESTRA *descends the steps, and lays her hand on the arm of* ÆGISTHUS.*)*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Put up the sword! Enough of blood is spilt.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hist! Oh, not half—Orestes is escaped.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sufficient for the future be that thought.
What's done is well done. What's undone—yet more:
Some thing still saved from crime.

ÆGISTHUS.

This lion's whelp
Will work some mischief yet.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He is a child—

—Our own—we will but war upon the strong.
Not upon infants. Let this matter rest.

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, ever, in the wake of thy great will
Let me steer sure! and we will leave behind
Great tracks of light upon the wondering world.
If but you err not here—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

These pale-eyed groups!
See how they huddle shuddering, and stand round;
As when some mighty beast, the brindled lord
Of the rough woodside, sends his wild death-roar
Up the shrill caves, the meaner denizens
Of ancient woods, shy deer, and timorous hares,
Peer from the hairy thickets, and shrink back.
We fear'd the lion, and we smote him down.
Now fear is over. Shall we turn aside
To harry jackalls? Laugh! we have not laugh'd
So long, I think you have forgotten how!
Have we no right to laugh like other men?
Ha! Ha! I laugh. Now it is time to laugh!

CHORUS.

O awful sight! Look where the bloody sun,
As tho' with Agamemnon he were slain,
Runs reeking, lurid, down the palace floors!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my belov'd! Now will we reign sublime,
And set our foot upon the neck of Fortune!
And, for the rest—oh, much remains!—For you,
(*To the* Chorus.)
A milder sway, if mildly you submit
To our free service and supremacy.
Nor tax, nor toll, to carry dim results
Of distant war beyond the perilous seas.
But gateless justice in our halls of state,

And peace in all the borders of our land!
For you—

(To ELECTRA, *who has thrown herself upon the body of* AGAMEMNON.)

ELECTRA.

Oh, hush! What more remains to me,
But this dead hand, whose clasp is cold in mine?
And all the baffled memory of the past,
Buried with him? What more?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

—A mother's heart,
If you will come to it. Free confidence.
A liberal share in all our future hope.
Now, more than ever—mutually weak—
We stand in need, each of the other's love.
Our love! it shall not sacrifice thee, child,
To wanton whims of war, as he, of old,
Did thy dead sister. If you will not these,
But answer love with scorn, why then—

ELECTRA.

—What then?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Safe silence. And permission to forget.

XX. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

What shall we say? What has been done?
Shed no tear! Oh, shed no tear!
Hang up his harness in the sun;
The hookëd car, and barbëd spear;

And all war's adamantine gear
Of trophied spoils ; for all his toils
Are over, alas ! are over, and done !
What shall we say? what has been done ?
Shed no tear ! O, shed no tear !
But keep solemn silence all,
As befits when heroes fall ;
Solemn as his fame is ; sad
As his end was ; earth shall wear
Mourning for him. See, the sun
Blushes red for what is done !
And the wild stars, one by one,
Peer out of the lurid air,
And shrink back with awe, and fear,
Shuddering, for what is done.
When the night comes, dark, and dun,
As our sorrow ; blackness far
Shutting out the crimson sun ;
Turn his face to the moon, and star,—
These are bright as his glories are—
And great Heaven shall see its son !
What shall we say ? what has been done ?
Shed no tear ! oh, shed no tear !
Gather round him, friends ! Look here !
All the wreaths which he hath won
In the race that he hath run—
Laurel garlands, every one !
These are things to think upon,
Mourning till the set of sun—
Till the mourning moon appear.
Now the wreaths which Fame begun
To uplift, to crown his head,
Memory shall seize upon,
And make chaplets for his bier.
He shall have wreaths tho' he be dead !
But his monument is here,
Built up in our hearts, and dear
To all honour. Shed no tear !
Oh, let not any tear be shed !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Cassandra ! she is stooping down.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She dips and moves her fingers in the blood !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to her ! There's a wildness in her eye !

SEMI-CHORUS.

What does she ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Oh, in Agamemnon's blood,
She hath writ *Orestes* on the palace steps !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus !

ÆGISTHUS.

Queen and bride !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We have not fail'd.

CHORUS.

Come, venerable, ancient Night !
From sources of the western stars,
In darkest shade that fits this woe.
Consoler of a thousand griefs,
And likest death unalterably calm.
We toil, aspire, and sorrow,
And in a little while shall cease.
For we know not whence we came,
And who can ensure the morrow ?
Thou, eternally the same,
From of old, in endless peace
Eternally survivest ;

Enduring on thro' good and ill,
Coëval with the Gods; and still
In thine own silence livest.
Our days thou leadest home
To the great Whither which has no Again!
Impartially to pleasure and to pain
Thou sett'st the bourne. To thee shall all things come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But, if he cease to love me, what is gain'd?

CASSANDRA.

With wings darkly spreading,
Like ravens to the carcass
Scenting far off the savour of blood,
From shores of the unutterable River,
They gather and swoop,
They waver, they darken.
From the fangs that raven,
From the eyes that glare
Intolerably fierce,
Save me, Apollo!
Ai! Ai! Ai!
Alinon! Alinon!
Blood, blood! and of kindred nature,
Which the young wolf returning
Shall dip his fangs in,
Thereby accursedly
Imbibing madness!

CHORUS.

The wild woman is uttering strange things
Fearful to listen to.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Within the House
Straightway confine her,
There to learn wisdom.

ÆGISTHUS.

Orestes—oh, this child's life now outweighs
That mighty ruin, Agamemnon dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus, dost thou love me?

ÆGISTHUS.

As my life!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou lovest me! O love, we have not fail'd.
Give me thy hand. So . . . lead me to the House.
Let me lean on thee. I am very weak.

CHORUS.

Only Heaven is high.
Only the Gods are great.
Above the searchless sky,
In unremovëd state,
They from their golden mansions,
Look over the lands, and the seas;
The ocean's wide expansions,
And the earth's varieties:
Secure of their supremacy,
And sure of affluent ease.
Who shall say "I stand!" nor fall?
Destiny is over all!
Rust will crumble old renown.
Bust and column tumble down;
Keep, and castle; tower, and town;
Throne, and sceptre; crest and crown.
Destiny is over all!
One by one, the pale guests fall
At lighted feast, in palace hall;
And feast is turn'd to funeral.
Who shall say "I stand!" nor fall?
Destiny is over all!

GOOD-NIGHT IN THE PORCH.

A LITTLE longer in the light, love, let me be. The air is warm.
I hear the cuckoo's last good-night float from the copse below the Farm.
A little longer, Sister sweet—your hand in mine—on this old seat.

In yon red gable, which the rose creeps round and o'er, your casement shines
Against the yellow west, o'er those forlorn and solitary pines.
The long, long day is nearly done. How silent all the place is grown!

The stagnant levels, one and all, are burning in the distant marsh—
Hark! 'twas the bittern's parting call. The frogs are out: with murmurs harsh
The low reeds vibrate. See! the sun catches the long pools one by one.

A moment, and those orange flats will turn dead gray or lurid white.
Look up! o'erhead the winnowing bats are come and gone, eluding sight.
The little worms are out. The snails begin to move down shining trails,

With slow pink cones, and soft wet horns. The garden-bowers are dim with dew.
With sparkling drops the white-rose thorns are twinkling, where the sun slips thro'
Those reefs of coral buds hung free below the purple Judas-tree.

From the warm upland comes a gust made fragrant
with the brown hay there.
The meek cows, with their white horns thrust above
the hedge, stand still and stare.
The steaming horses from the wains droop o'er the
tank their plaited manes.

And o'er yon hill-side brown and barren (where
you and I as children play'd,
Starting the rabbit to his warren), I hear the sandy,
shrill cascade
Leap down upon the vale, and spill his heart out
round the muffled mill.

O can it be for nothing only that God has shown
his world to me?
Or but to leave the heart more lonely with loss of
beauty . . . can it be?
O closer, closer, Sister dear . . . nay, I have kist
away that tear.

God bless you, Dear, for that kind thought which
only upon tears could rise!
God bless you for the love that sought to hide them
in those drooping eyes,
Whose lids I kiss! . . . poor lids, so red! but let my
kiss fall there instead.

Yes sad indeed it seems, each night—and sadder,
Dear, for your sweet sake!
To watch the last low lingering light, and know
not where the morn may break.
To-night we sit together here. To-morrow night
will come . . . . ah, where?

O child! howe'er assured be faith, to say farewell
is fraught with gloom,
When, like one flower, the germs of death and
genius ripen toward the tomb;

And earth each day, as some fond face at parting,
gains a graver grace.

There's not a flower, there's not a tree in this old
garden where we sit,
But what some fragrant memory is closed and folded
up in it.
To-night the dog-rose smells as wild, as fresh, as
when I was a child.

'Tis eight years since (do you forget?) we set those
lilies near the wall:
You were a blue-eyed child: even yet I seem to
see the ringlets fall—
The golden ringlets, blown behind your shoulders
in the merry wind.

Ah, me! old times, they cling, they cling! And
oft by yonder green old gate
The field shows thro,' in morns of spring, an eager
boy, I paused elate
With all sweet fancies loos'd from school. And oft,
you know, when eves were cool,

In summer-time, and thro' the trees young gnats
began to be about,
With some old book upon your knees 'twas here
you watch'd the stars come out.
While oft, to please me, you sang thro' some foolish
song I made for you.

And there's my epic—I began when life seem'd
long, tho' longer art—
And all the glorious deeds of man made golden riot
in my heart—
Eight books . . . it will not number nine! I die
before my heroine.

Sister! they say that drowning men in one wild
moment can recall

Their whole life long, and feel again the pain—the
bliss—that throng'd it all :—
Last night those phantoms of the Past again came
crowding round me fast.

Near morning, when the lamp was low, against the
wall they seem'd to flit;
And, as the wavering light would glow or fall, they
came and went with it.
The ghost of boyhood seem'd to gaze down the dark
verge of vanisht days.

Once more the garden where she walk'd on sum-
mer eves to tend her flowers,
Once more the lawn where first we talk'd of future
years in twilight hours
Arose; once more she seem'd to pass before me in
the waving grass

To that old terrace; her bright hair about her warm
neck all undone,
And waving on the balmy air, with tinges of the
dying sun.
Just one star kindling in the west: just one bird
singing near its nest.

So lovely, so beloved! Oh, fair as tho' that sun had
never set
Which staid upon her golden hair, in dreams I
seem to see her yet!
To see her in that old green place—the same husht,
smiling, cruel face!

A little older, love, than you are now; and I was
then a boy;
And wild and wayward-hearted too; to her my
passion was a toy,
Soon broken! ah, a foolish thing—a butterfly with
crumpled wing!

Her hair, too, was like yours—as bright, but with a
warmer golden tinge:
Her eyes—a somewhat deeper light, and dream'd
below a longer fringe:
And still that strange grave smile she had stays in
my heart and keeps it sad!

There's no one knows it, truest friend, but you: for
I have never breath'd
To other ears the frozen end of those spring-gar-
lands Hope once wreath'd;
And death will come before again I breathe that
name untouch'd by pain.

From little things—a star, a flower—that touch'd
us with the self-same thought,
My passion deepen'd hour by hour, until to that
fierce heat 'twas wrought,
Which, shrivelling over every nerve, crumbled the
outworks of reserve.

I told her then, in that wild time, the love I knew
she long had seen;
The accusing pain that burn'd like crime, yet left
me nobler than I had been;
What matter with what words I woo'd her? She
said I had misunderstood her.

And something more—small matter what! of
friendship something—sister's love—
She said that I was young—knew not my own
heart—as the years would prove—
She wish'd me happy—she conceived an interest
in me—and believed

I should grow up to something great—and soon for-
get her—soon forget
This fancy—and congratulate my life she had re-
leased it, yet—

With more such words—a lie! a lie! She broke
my heart, and flung it by!

A life's libation lifted up, from her proud lip she
dash'd untasted:
There trampled lay love's costly cup, and in the
dust the wine was wasted.
She knew I could not pour such wine again at any
other shrine.

Then I remember a numb mood: mad murmurings
of the words she said:
A slow shame smouldering through my blood; that
surged and sung within my head:
And drunken sunlights reeling thro' the leaves:
above, the burnish't blue

Hot on my eyes—a blazing shield: a noise among
the waterfalls:
A free crow up the brown cornfield floating at will:
faint shepherd-calls:
And reapers reaping in the shocks of gold: and
girls with purple frocks:

All which the more confused my brain: and noth-
ing could I realize
But the great fact of my own pain: I saw the
fields: I heard the cries:
The crow's shade dwindled up the hill: the world
went on: my heart stood still.

I thought I held in my hot hand my life crusht up:
I could have tost
The crumpled riddle from me, and laugh'd loud to
think what I had lost.
A bitter strength was in my mind: like Samson,
when she scorned him—blind,

And casting reckless arms about the props of life to
hug them down—

A madman with his eyes put out. But all my anger was my own.
I spared the worm upon my walk: I left the white rose on its stalk.

All's over long since. Was it strange that I was mad with grief and shame?
And I would cross the seas, and change my ancient home, my father's name?
In the wild hope, if that might be, to change my own identity!

I know that I was wrong: I know it was not well to be so wild.
But the scorn stung so! . . . Pity now could wound not! . . . I have seen her child:
It had the self-same eyes she had: their gazing almost made me mad.

Dark violet eyes whose glances, deep with April-hints of sunny tears,
'Neath long soft lashes laid asleep, seem'd all too thoughtful for her years;
As tho' from mine her gaze had caught the secret of some mournful thought.

But, when she spoke her father's air broke o'er her . . . that clear confident voice!
Some happy souls there are, that wear their nature lightly; these rejoice
The world by living; and receive from all men more than what they give.

One handful of their buoyant chaff exceeds our hoards of careful grain:
Because their love breaks thro' their laugh, while ours is fraught with tender pain:
The world, that knows itself too sad, is proud to keep some faces glad:

And, so it is! from such an one Misfortune softly steps aside
To let him still walk in the sun. These things must be. I cannot chide.
Had I been she I might have made the selfsame choice. She shunn'd the shade.

To some men God hath given laughter: but tears to some men He hath given:
He bade us sow in tears, hereafter to harvest holier smiles in Heaven:
And tears and smiles, they are His gift: both good, to smite or to uplift:

He knows His sheep: the wind and showers beat not too sharply the shorn lamb:
His wisdom is more wise than ours: He knew my nature—what I am:
He tempers smiles with tears: both good, to bear in time the Christian mood.

O yet—in scorn of mean relief, let Sorrow bear her heavenly fruit!
Better the wildest hour of grief than the low pastime of the brute!
Better to weep, for He wept too, than laugh as every fool can do!

For sure, 'twere best to bear the cross; nor lightly fling the thorns behind;
Lest we grow happy by the loss of what was noblest in the mind.
—Here—in the ruins of my years—Father, I bless Thee thro' these tears!

It was in the far foreign lands this sickness came upon me first.

Below strange suns, 'mid alien hands this fever of the south was nurst,
Until it reach'd some vital part. I die not of a broken heart.

O think not that! If I could live . . . there's much to live for—worthy life.
It is not for what fame could give—tho' that I scorn not—but the strife
Were noble for its own sake too. I thought that I had much to do—

But God is wisest! Hark, again! . . . 'twas yon black bittern, as he rose
Against the wild light o'er the fen. How red your little casement glows!
The night falls fast. How lonely, Dear, this bleak old house will look next year!

So sad a thought? . . . ah, yes! I know it is not good to brood on this:
And yet—such thoughts will come and go, unbidden. 'Tis that you should miss,
My darling, one familiar tone of this weak voice when I am gone.

And, for what's past—I will not say in what she did that all was right,
But all's forgiven; and I pray for her heart's welfare, day and night.
All things are changed! This cheek would glow even near hers but faintly now!

Thou—God! before whose sleepless eye not even in vain the sparrows fall,
Receive, sustain me! Sanctify my soul. Thou know'st, Thou lovest all.
Too weak to walk alone—I see Thy hand: I falter back to Thee.

Saved from the curse of time which throws its baseness on us day by day:
Its wretched joys, and worthless woes; till all the heart is worn away.
I feel Thee near. I hold my breath, by the half-open doors of Death.

And sometimes, glimpses from within of glory (wondrous sight and sound!)
Float near me:—faces pure from sin; strange music; saints with splendor crown'd:
I seem to feel my native air blow down from some high region there,

And fan my spirit pure: I rise above the sense of loss and pain:
Faint forms that lured my childhood's eyes, long lost, I seem to find again:
I see the end of all: I feel hope, awe, no language can reveal.

Forgive me, Lord, if overmuch I loved that form Thou mad'st so fair;
I know that Thou didst make her such; and fair but as the flowers were—
Thy work: her beauty was but Thine; the human less than the divine.

My life hath been one search for Thee 'mid thorns found red with Thy dear blood:
In many a dark Gethsemanë I seem'd to stand where Thou hadst stood:
And, scorn'd in this world's Judgment-Place, at times, thro' tears, to catch Thy face.

Thou suffered'st here, and didst not fail: Thy bleeding feet these paths have trod:
But Thou wert strong, and I am frail: and I am man, and Thou wert God.

Be near me: keep me in Thy sight: or lay my soul
asleep in light.

O to be where the meanest mind is more than
Shakespeare! where one look
Shows more than here the wise can find, tho' toil-
ing slow from book to book!
Where life is knowledge: love is sure: and hope's
brief promise made secure.

O dying voice of human praise! the crude ambitions
of my youth!
I long to pour immortal lays! great pæans of peren-
nial Truth!
A larger work! a loftier aim! . . . and what are
laurel-leaves, and fame?

And what are words? How little these the silence
of the soul express!
Mere froth—the foam and flower of seas whose
hungering waters heave and press
Against the planets and the sides of night—mute,
yearning, mystic tides!

To ease the heart with song is sweet: sweet to be
heard if heard by love.
And you have heard me. When we meet shall we
not sing the old songs above
To grander music? Sweet, one kiss. O blest it
is to die like this!

To lapse from being without pain: your hand in
mine, on mine your heart:
The unshaken faith to meet again that sheaths the
pang with which we part:
My head upon your bosom, sweet: your hand in
mine, on this old seat!

So; closer wind that tender arm . . . How the hot
tears fall! Do not weep,
Belov'd, but let your smile stay warm about me.
"In the Lord they sleep."
You know the words the Scripture saith . . . O
light, O Glory! . . . is this death?

THE EARL'S RETURN.

RAGGED and tall stood the castle wall.
And the squires, at their sport, in the great South
Court,
Lounged all day long from stable to hall
Laughingly, lazily, one and all.
The land about was barren and blue,
And swept by the wing of the wet sea-mew.
Seven fishermen's huts on a shelly shore:
Sand-heaps behind, and sand-banks before:
And a black champaigne streaked white all thro'
To a great salt pool which the ocean drew,
Suck'd into itself, and disgorged it again
To stagnate and steam on the mineral plain;
Not a tree or a bush in the circle of sight,
But a bare black thorn which the sea-winds had
wither'd
With the drifting scum of the surf and blight,
And some patches of gray grass-land to the right,
Where the lean red-hided cattle were tether'd:
A reef of rock wedged the water in twain,
And a stout stone tower stood square to the main.

And the flakes of the spray that were jerk'd away
From the froth on the lip of the bleak blue sea
Were sometimes flung by the wind, as it swung
Over turret and terrace and balcony,

To the garden below where, in desolate corners
Under the mossy green parapet there,
The lilies crouch'd, rocking their white heads like mourners,
And burn'd off the heads of the flowers that were
Pining and pale in their comfortless bowers,
Dry-bush'd with the sharp stubborn lavender,
And paven with disks of the torn sun-flowers,
Which, day by day, were strangled, and stripp'd
Of their ravelling fringes and brazen bosses,
And the hardy mary-buds nipp'd and ripp'd
Into shreds for the beetles that lurk'd in the mosses.

Here she lived alone, and from year to year
She saw the black belt of the ocean appear
At her casement each morn as she rose; and each morn
Her eye fell first on the bare black thorn.
This was all: nothing more: or sometimes on the shore
The fishermen sang when the fishing was o'er;
Or the lowing of oxen fell dreamily,
Close on the shut of the glimmering eves,
Thro' some gusty pause in the moaning sea,
When the pools were splash'd pink by the thirsty beeves.
Or sometimes, when the pearl-lighted morns drew the tinges
Of the cold sunrise up their amber fringes,
A white sail peer'd over the rim of the main,
Look'd all about o'er the empty sea,
Stagger'd back from the fine line of white light again,
And dropp'd down to another world silently.
Then she breath'd freer. With sickening dread
She had watch'd five pale young moons unfold
From their notchy cavern in light, and spread

To the fuller light, and again grow old,
And dwindle away to a luminous shred.
"He will not come back till the Spring's green and gold.
"And I would that I with the leaves were dead,
"Quiet somewhere with them in the moss and the mould,
"When he and the summer come this way," she said.

And when the dull sky darken'd down to the edges,
And the keen frost kindled in star and spar,
The sea might be known by a noise on the ledges
Of the long crags, gathering power from afar
Thro' his roaring bays, and crawling back
Hissing, as o'er the wet pebbles he dragg'd
His skirt of foam fray'd, dripping, and jagg'd,
And reluctantly fell down the smooth hollow shell
Of the night, whose lustrous surface of black
In spots to an intense blue was worn.
But later, when up on the sullen sea-bar
The wide large-lighted moon had arisen,
Where the dark and voluminous ocean grew luminous,
Helping after her slowly one little shy star
That shook blue in the cold, and look'd forlorn,
The clouds were troubled, and the wind from his prison
Behind them leap'd down with a light laugh of scorn;
Then the last thing she saw was that bare black thorn;
For the forkëd tree as the bleak blast took it,
Howl'd thro' it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,
Seem'd to visibly waste and wither and wizen.

And the snow was lifted into the air
Layer by layer,

And turn'd into vast white clouds that flew
Silent and fleet up the sky, and were riven
And jerk'd into chasms which the sun leap'd thro',
Opening crystal gulfs of a breezy blue
Fed with rainy lights of the April heaven.
From eaves and leaves the quivering dew
Sparkled off; and the rich earth, black and bare,
Was starr'd with snow-drops everywhere;
And the crocus upturn'd its flame, and burn'd
Here and there.
"The Summer," she said, "cometh blithe and bold;
And the crocus is lit for her welcoming;
And the days will have garments of purple and gold;
But I would be left by the pale green Spring
With the snow-drops somewhere under the mould;
"For I dare not think what the Summer may bring."

Pale she was as the bramble blooms
That fill the long fields with their faint perfumes,
When the May-wind flits finely thro' sun-threaded showers,
Breathing low to himself in his dim meadow-bowers.
And her cheek each year was paler and thinner,
And white as the pearl that was hung at her ear,
As her sad heart sicken'd and pined within her,
And fail'd and fainted from year to year.
So that the Seneschal, rough and gray,
Said, as he look'd in her face one day,
"St. Catherine save all good souls I pray,
For our pale young lady is paling away.
O the Saints," he said, smiling bitter and grim,
"Know she's too fair and too good for him!"
Sometimes she walk'd on the upper leads,
And lean'd on the arm of the weather-worn Warden.

Sometimes she sat 'twixt the mildewy beds
Of the sea-singed flowers in the Pleasaunce Garden.
Till the rotting blooms that lay thick on the walks
Were comb'd by the white sea-gust like a rake,
And the stimulant steam of the leaves and stalks
Made the coilëd memory, numb and cold,
That slept in her heart like a dreaming snake,
Drowsily lift itself fold by fold,
And gnaw and gnaw hungrily, half-awake.

Sometimes she look'd from the window below
To the great South Court, and the squires, at their sport,
Loungingly loitering to and fro.
She heard the grooms there as they curs'd one another.
She heard the great bowls falling all day long
In the bowling alleys. She heard the song
Of the shock-headed Pages that drank without stint in
The echoing courts, and swore hard at each other.
She saw the red face of the rough wooden Quintin,
And the swinging sand-bag ready to smother
The awkward Squire that miss'd the mark.
And, all day long, between the dull noises
Of the bowls, and the oaths, and the singing voices,
The sea boom'd hoarse till the skies were dark.

But when the swallow, that sweet new-comer,
Floated over the sea in the front of the summer,
The salt dry sands burn'd white, and sicken'd
Men's sight in the glaring horn of the bay;
And all things that fasten, or float at ease
In the silvery light of the leprous seas
With the pulse of a hideous life were quicken'd,

Fell loose from the rocks, and crawl'd crosswise away,
Slippery sidelong crabs, half strangled
By the white sea grasses in which they were tangled,
And those half-living creatures, orb'd, ray'd, and
sharp-angled,
Fan-fish, and star-fish, and polypous lumps,
Hueless and boneless, that languidly thicken'd,
Or flat-faced, or spikëd, or ridgëd with humps,
Melting off from their clotted clusters and clumps,
Sprawl'd over the shore in the heat of the day.

An hour beforé the sun was set
A darker ripple roll'd over the sea;
The white rocks quiver'd in wells of jet;
And the great West, opening breathlessly
Up all his inmost orange, gave
Hints of something distant and sweet
That made her heart swell; far up the wave
The clouds that lay piled in the golden heat
Were turn'd into types of the ancient mountains
In an ancient land; the weeds, which forlorn
Waves were swaying neglectfully,
By their sound, as they dipp'd into sparkles that
dripp'd
In the emerald creeks that ran up from the shore,
Brought back to her fancy the bubble of fountains
Leaping and falling continually
In valleys where she should wander no more.

And when, over all of these, the night
Among her mazy and milk-white signs,
And cluster'd orbs, and zig-zag lines,
Burst into blossom of stars and light,
The sea was glassy; the glassy brine
Was paven with lights—blue, crystalline,
And emerald keen; the dark world hung
Balanced under the moon, and swung
In a net of silver sparkles. Then she
Rippled her yellow hair to her knee,

Bared her warm white bosom and throat,
And from the lattice lean'd athirst.
There, on the silence did she gloat
With a dizzy pleasure steep'd in pain,
Half catching the soul of the secret that blended
God with his starlight, then feeling it vain,
Like a pining poet ready to burst
With the weight of the wonder that grows in his brain,
Or a nightingale, mute at the sound of a lute
That is swelling and breaking his heart with its strain,
Waiting, breathless, to die when the music is ended.
For the sleek and beautiful midnight stole,
Like a faithless friend, her secret care,
Crept thro' each pore to the source of the soul,
And mock'd at the anguish which he found there,
Shining away from her, scornful and fair
In his pitiless beauty, refusing to share
The discontent which he could not control.

The water-rat; as he skulk'd in the moat,
Set all the slumbrous lilies afloat,
And sent a sharp quick pulse along
The stagnant light, that heaved and swung
The leaves together. Suddenly
At times a shooting star would spin
Shell-like out of heaven, and tumble in,
And burst o'er a city of stars; but she,
As he dash'd on the back of the zodiac,
And quiver'd and glow'd down arc and node,
And split sparkling into infinity,
Thought that some angel, in his reveries
Thinking of earth, as he pensively
Lean'd over the star-grated balcony
In his palace among the Pleiades,
And grieved for the sorrow he saw in the land,
Had dropp'd a white lily from his loose hand.

And thus many a night, steep'd pale in the light
Of the stars, when the bells and clocks
Had ceased in the towers, and the sound of the hours
Was eddying about in the rocks,
Deep-sunken in bristling broidery between the black oak Fiends sat she,
And under the moth-flitted canopy
Of the mighty antique bed in her chamber,
With wild eyes drinking up the sea, and her white hands heavy with jewelry,
Flashing as she loosed languidly
Her satins of snow and of amber.
And as, fold by fold, these were rippled and roll'd
To her feet, and lay huddled in ruins of gold,
She look'd like some pale spirit above
Earth's dazzling passions forever flung by,
Free'd from the stains of an earthly love,
And those splendid shackles of pride that press
On the heart till it aches with the gorgeous stress,
Quitting the base Past remorsefully.
And so she put by the coil and care
Of the day that lay furl'd like an idle weft
Of heapëd spots which a bright snake hath left,
Or that dark house, the blind worm's lair,
When the star-wingëd moth from the windows hath crept,
Steep'd her soul in a tearful prayer,
Shrank into her naked self, and slept.

And as she slumber'd, starr'd and eyed
All over with angry gems, at her side,
The Fiends in the oak kept ward and watch ;
And the querulous clock, on its rusty catch,
With a quick tick, husky and thick,
Clamour'd and clack'd at her sharply.
There was
(Fronting a portrait of the Earl)
A shrine with a dim green lamp, and a cross

Of glowing cedar wreath'd with pearl,
Which the Arimathæan, so it was writ,
When he came from the holy Orient,
Had worn, with his prayers embalming it,
As with the San-Grael thro' the world he went.
Underneath were relics and gems
From many an antique king-saint's crown,
And some ('twas avouch'd) from the dusk diadems
And mighty rings of those Wise Kings
That evermore sleep 'mid the marble stems,
'Twixt chancel and chalice in God his palace,
The marvel of Cologne Town.
In a halo dim of the lamp all night
Smiled the sad Virgin, holy and white,
With a face as full of the soul's affliction
As one that had look'd on the Crucifixion.

At moon-rise the land was suddenly brighter;
And thro' all its length and breadth the casement
Grew large with a luminous strange amazement;
And, as doubting in dreams what that sudden blaze
meant,
The Lady's white face turn'd a thought whiter.

Sometimes in sleep light finger-tips
Touch'd her behind; the pain, the bliss
Of a long slow despairing kiss
Doubled the heat on her feverish lips,
And down to her heart's-heart smouldering burn'd;
From lips long mute she heard her name;
Sad dreams and sweet to vex her came;
Sighing, upon her pillow she turn'd,
Like a weary waif on a weary sea
That is heaving over continually,
And finds no course, until for its sake
The heart of the silence begins to ache.
Unsooth'd from slumber she awoke
An hour ere dawn. The lamp burn'd faint.
The Fiends glared at her out of the oak.

She rose, and fell at the shrine of the Saint.
There with claspëd hands to the Mother
Of many sorrows, in sorrow, she pray'd;
Till all things in the room melted into each other,
And vanish'd in gyres of flickering shade,
Leaving her all alone, with the face
Of the Saint growing large in its one bright place.
Then on a sudden, from far, a fear
Thro' all her heart its horror drew,
As of something hideous growing near.
Cold fingers seem'd roaming thro' her damp hair.
Her lips were lock'd. The power of prayer
Left her. She dared not turn. She knew,
From his panel atilt on the wall up there,
The grim Earl was gazing her thro' and thro'.

But when the casement, a grisly square,
Flicker'd with day, she flung it wide,
And look'd below. The shore was bare.
In the mist tumbled the dismal tide.
One ghastly pool seem'd solid white;
The forkëd shadow of the thorn
Fell thro' it, like a raven rent
In the steadfast blank down which it went.
The blind world slowly gather'd sight.
The sea was moaning on to morn.

And the Summer into the Autumn waned.
And under the watery Hyades
The gray sea swell'd, and the thick sky rain'd,
And the land was darken'd by slow degrees.

But oft, in the low West, the day
Smouldering sent up a sullen flame
Along the dreary waste of gray,
As tho' in that red region lay,
Heap'd up, like Autumn weeds and flowers
For fire, its thorny fruitless hours,
And God said, "burn it all away!"

When all was dreariest in the skies,
And the gusty tract of twilight mutter'd,
A strange slow smile grew into her eyes,
As tho' from a great way off it came
And was weary ere down to her lips it flutter'd,
And turn'd into a sigh, or some soft name
Whose syllables sounded likest sighs,
Half smother'd in sorrow before they were utter'd.

Sometimes, at night, a music was roll'd—
A ripple of silver harp-strings cold—
From the halls below where the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair, and the golden tongue,
And the eyes of passionless, peaceful blue
(Like twilight which faint stars gaze thro',)
Wise with the years which no man knew.
And first the music, as tho' the wings
Of some blind angel were caught in the strings,
Flutter'd with weak endeavour: anon
The uncaged heart of music grew bold
And cautiously loosen'd, length by length,
The golden cone of its great under-tone,
Like a strong man using mild language to one
That is weaker, because he is sure of his strength.

But once—and it was at the fall of the day,
When she, if she closed her eyes, did seem
To be wandering far, in a sort of dream,
With some lost shadow, away, away,
Down the heart of a golden land which she
Remember'd a great way over the sea,
There came a trample of horses and men;
And a blowing of horns at the Castle-Gate;
Then a clattering noise; then a pause; and then,
With the sudden jerk of a heavy weight,
And a wrangling and jangling and clinking and
clanking,
The sound of the falling of cable and chain;
And a grumbling over the dewy planking

That shriek'd and sung with the weight and strain
And the rough Seneschal bawl'd out in the hall
"The Earl and the Devil are come back again!"

Her heart stood still for a moment or more.
Then suddenly tugg'd, and strain'd, and tore
At the roots, which seem'd to give way beneath.
She rush'd to the window, and held her breath.
High up on the beach were the long black ships:
And the brown sails hung from the masts in strips;
And the surf was whirl'd over and over them,
And swept them dripping from stern to stem.
Within, in the great square court below,
Were a hundred rough-faced men, or so.
And one or two pale fair-hair'd slaves
Which the Earl had brought over the winter waves.

There was a wringing of horny hands;
And a swearing of oaths; and a great deal of laughter;
The grim Earl growling his hoarse commands
To the Warden that follow'd him growling after;
A lowing of cattle along the wet sands;
And a plashing of hoofs on the slippery rafter,
As the long-tail'd black-maned horses each
Went over the bridge from the gray sea-beach.

Then quoth the grim Earl, "fetch me a stoop!"
And they brought him a great bowl that dripp'd from the brim,
Which he seiz'd upon with a satisfied whoop,
Drain'd, and flung at the head of him
That brought it; then, with a laugh like a howl,
Strok'd his beard; and strode in thro' the door with a growl.

Meanwhile the pale lady grew white and whiter,
As the poplar pales when the keen winds smite her:

And, as the tree sways to the gust, and heaves
Quick ripples of white alarm up the leaves,
So did she seem to shrink and reel
From the casement—one quiver from head to heel
Of whitest fear. For she heard below,
On the creaking stairway loud and slow,
Like drops that plunge audibly down from the thunder
Into a sea that is groaning under,
The heavy foot of the Earl as he mounted
Step after step to the turret: she counted
Step after step, as he hasten'd or halted;
Now clashing shrill thro' the archways vaulted;
Now muffled and thick; now loud, and more
Loud as he came near the Chamber door.
Then there fell, with a rattle and shock,
An iron glove on the iron lock,
And the door burst open—the Earl burst thro' it—
But she saw him not. The window-pane,
Far off, grew large and small again;
The staggering light did wax and wane,
Till there came a snap of the heavy brain;
And a slow-subsiding pulse of pain;
And the whole world darken'd into rest,
As the grim Earl press'd to his grausome breast
His white wife. She hung heavy there
On his shoulder without breath,
Darkly fill'd with sleepy death
From her heart up to her eyes;
Dead asleep: and ere he knew it
(How Death took her by surprise
Helpless in her great despair)
Smoothing back her yellow hair,
He kiss'd her icy brows; unwound
His rough arms, and she fell to the ground.

"The woman was fairer than she was wise:
But the serpent was wiser than she was fair:
For the serpent was lord in Paradise

Or ever the woman came there.
But when Eden-gates were barr'd amain,
And the fiery sword on guard in the East,
The lion arose from a long repose,
And quoth he, as he shook out his royal mane,
'Now I am the strongest beast.'
Had the woman been wiser when she was queen
The lion had never been king, I ween.
But ever since storms began to lower
Beauty on earth hath been second to Power!"
And this is the song that the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
Who sung by night in the grim Earl's hall.
And they held him in reverence one and all.

And so she died—the pale-faced girl.
And, for nine days after that, the Earl
Fumed and fret, and raved and swore,
Pacing up and down the chamber-floor,
And tearing his black beard as he went
In the fit of his sullen discontent.
And the Seneschal said it was fearful to hear him;
And not even the weather-worn Warden went near him;
And the shock-headed Pages huddled anear,
And bit their white lips till they bled, for fear.

But at last he bade them lift her lightly,
And bury her by the gray sea-shore,
Where the winds that blew from her own land nightly
Might wail round her grave thro' the wild rocks hoar.
So they lifted her lightly at dead of night,
And bore her down by the long torch-light—
Lank-hair'd faces, sallow and keen,
That burn'd out of the glassy pools between
The splashing sands which, as they plunged thro',
The coffin-lead weigh'd them down into;

And their feet, as they pluck'd them up, left pits
Which the water ooz'd into and out of by fits—
—And so to the deep-mouth'd bay's black brim,
Where the pale priests, all white-stoled and dim,
Lifted the cross and chanted the hymn,
That her soul might have peace when her bones were dust,
And her name be written among the Just.
The Warden walked after the Seneschal grim;
And the shock-headed Pages walk'd after him:
And with mattock and spade a grave was made,
Where they carved the cross, and they wrote her name,
And, returning each by the way that he came,
They left her under the bare black thorn.

The salt sea-wind sang shrill in the head of it;
And the bitter night grew chill with the dread of it;
When the great round moon rose up forlorn
From the reefs, and whiten'd towards the morn.
For the forkéd tree, as the bleak blast took it,
Howl'd thro' it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,
Like a living thing bewitch'd and bedevil'd,
Visibly shrunk, and shudder'd and shrivel'd.

And again the swallow, that false new-comer,
Flutter'd over the sea in the front of the summer;
A careless singer, as he should be
That only skimmeth the mighty sea;
Dipp'd his wings as he came and went,
And chirrup'd and twitter'd for heart's content,
And built on the new-made grave. But when
The Summer was over he flew back again.

And the Earl, as years went by, and his life
Grew listless, took him another wife:
And the Seneschal grim, and the Warden gray
Walk'd about in their wonted way:
And the lean-jaw'd shock-hair'd Pages too

Sung and swill'd as they used to do.
And the grooms, and the squires gamed and swore
And quarrel'd again as they quarrel'd before;
And the flowers decay'd in their dismal beds,
And dropp'd off from their lean shanks one by one,
Till nothing was left but the stalks and the heads,
Clump'd into heaps, or ripp'd into shreds,
To steam into salt in the sickly sun.

And the cattle low'd late up the glimmering plain,
Or dipp'd knee-deep, and splash'd themselves
In the pools spat out by the spiteful main,
Wallowing in sandy dykes and delves:
And the blear-eyed filmy sea did boom
With his old mysterious hungering sound:
And the wet wind wail'd in the chinks of the tomb,
Till the weeds in the surf were drench'd and drown'd.
But once a stranger came over the wave,
And paused by the pale-faced Lady's grave.

It was when, just about to set,
A sadness held the sinking sun.
The moon delayed to shine as yet:
The Ave-Mary chime was done:
And from the bell-tower lean'd the ringers;
And in the chancel paused the singers,
With lingering looks, and claspëd fingers:
And the day reluctantly turn'd to his rest,
Like some untold life, that leaves exprest
But the half of its hungering love ere it close:
So he went sadly toward his repose
Deep in the heart of the slumbrous waves
Kindled far off in the desolate West.
And the breeze sprang up in the cool sea-caves.
The castle stood with its courts in shade,
And all its toothëd towers imprest
On the sorrowful light that sunset made—
Such a light as sleeps shut up in the breast

Of some pining crimson-hearted rose,
Which, as you gaze at it, grows and grows
And all the warm leaves overflows;
Leaving its sweet source still to be guest.

The crumpled shadow of the thorn
Crawl'd over the sand-heaps raggedly,
And over the gray stone cross forlorn,
And on to that one man musing there
Moveless, while o'er him the night crept on,
And the hot yellow stars, slowly, one after one,
Mounted into the dark blue air
And brightened, and brightened. Then suddenly,
And sadly and silently,
Down the dim breezy rim of the sea sank the sun.

Ere the moon was abroad, the owl
Made himself heard in the echoing tower
Three times, four times. The bat with his cowl
Came and went round the lonely Bower
Where dwelt of yore the Earl's lost Lady.
There night after night, for years, in vain
The lingering moon had look'd through the pane,
And miss'd the face she used to find there,
White and wan like some mountain flower
In its rocky nook, as it paled and pined there
Only known to the moon and the wind there.
Lights flitted faint in the halls down lower
From lattice to lattice, and then glow'd steady.

The dipping gull: and the long gray pool:
And the reed that shows which way the breeze
blows cool,
From the wide warm sea to the low black land:
And the wave makes no sound on the soft yellow
sand:
But the inland shallows sharp and small
Are swarm'd about with the sultry midge:
And the land is still, and the ocean still:

And the weeds in the rifted rocks at will
Move on the tide, and float or glide.
And into the silent western side
Of the heaven the moon begins to fall.
But is it the fall of a plover's call
That is answer'd warily, low yet shrill,
From the sand-heapt mound and the rocky ridge?
And now o'er the dark plain so wild and wide
Falls the note of a horn from the old draw-bridge.

Who is it that waits at the castle-gates?
Call in the minstrel, and fill the bowl.
Bid him loose the great music and let the song roll.
Fill the bowl.
And first, as was due, to the Earl he bow'd:
Next to all the Sea-chieftains, blithe friends of the Earl's:
Then advanced thro' the praise of the murmuring crowd,
And sat down, as they bade him, and all his black curls
Bow'd over his harp, as in doubt which to choose
From the melodies coil'd at his heart. For a man
O'er some Beauty asleep for one moment might muse,
Half in love, ere he woke her. So ere he began,
He paused over his song. And they brought him, the Squires,
A heavy gold cup with the red wine ripe in it,
Then wave over wave of the sweet silver wires
'Gan ripple, and the minstrel took heart to begin it.

A harper that harps thorough mountain and glen,
Wandering, wandering the wide world over,
Sweetest of singers, yet saddest of men,
His soul's lost Lady in vain to discover.
Most fair, and most frail of the daughters of men,
O blest, and O curst, the man that should love her!
Who has not loved? and who has not lost?

Wherever he wander, the wide world over,
Singing by city, and castle, and plain,
Abiding never, forever a rover,
Each man that shall hear him will swear almost
In the minstrel's song that his heart can discover
The selfsame lady by whom it was crost,
For love is love the wide world over.

What shall he liken his love unto?
Have you seen some cloud the sun sets thro',
When the lingering night is close at hand?
Have you seen some rose lie on the snow?
Or a summer bird in a winter land?
Or a lily dying for dearth of dew?
Or a pearl sea-cast on a barren strand?
Some garden never sunshine warms
Nor any tend? some lonely tree
That stretches bleak its barren arms
Turn'd inland from the blighting sea?
Her cheek was pale: her face was fair:
Her heart, he sung, was weak and warm:
All golden was the sleepy hair
That floated round about her form,
And hid the sweetness breathing there.
Her eyes were wild, like stars that shine
Far off in summer nights divine:
But her smile—it was like the golden wine
Pour'd into the spirit, as into a cup,
With passion brimming it up, and up,
And marvellous fancies fair and fine.
He took her hair to make sweet strings:
He hid her smile deep in his song.
This makes so rich the tune he sings
That o'er the world 'twill linger long.

There is a land far, far away from yours.
And there the stars are thrice as bright as these.
And there the nightingale strange music pours
All day out of the hearts of myrtle trees.

There the voice of the cuckoo sounds never forlorn
As you hear it far off thro' the deep purple valleys.
And the firefly dances by night in the corn.
And the little round owls in the long cypress alleys
Whoop for joy when the moon is born.
There ripen the olive and the tulip tree,
And in the sun broadens the green prickly pear.
And the bright galingales in the grass you may see.
And the vine, with her royal blue globes, dwelleth there,
Climbing and hanging deliciously
By every doorway and lone latticed chamber,
Where the damselfly flits, and the heavy brown bee
Hums alone, and the quick lizards rustle and clamber.
And all things, there, live and rejoice together,
From the frail peach-blossom that first appears
When birds are about in the blue summer weather,
To the oak that has lived through his eight hundred years.
And the castles are built on the hills, not the plains.
(And the wild windflowers burn about in the courts there)
They are white and undrench'd by the gray winter rains.
And the swallows, and all things, are blithe at their sports there.
O for one moment, at sunset, to stand
Far, far away, in that dear distant land
Whence they bore her—the loveliest lady that ever
Crost the bleak ocean. Oh nevermore, never,
Shall she stand with her feet in the warm dry grasses
Where the faint balm-heaping breeze heavily passes,
And the white lotus-flower leans lone on the river!

Rare were the gems which she had for her dower.
But all the wild flowers she left behind her.

—A broken heart and a rose-roof'd bower.
O oft, and in many a desolate hour,
The cold strange faces she sees shall remind her
Of hearts that were warmer, and smiles that were kinder,
Lost, like the roses they pluck'd from her bower!
Lonely and far from her own land they laid her!
—A swallow flew over the sea to find her.
Ah cold, cold and narrow, the bed that they made her!
The swallow went forth with the summer to find her.
The summer and the swallow came back o'er the sea,
And strange were the tidings the bird brought to me.

And the minstrel sung, and they prais'd and listen'd—
Gazed and prais'd while the minstrel sung.
Flusht was each cheek, and each fixt eye glistened,
And husht was each voice to the minstrel's tongue.
But the Earl grew paler more and more
As the song of the Singer grew louder and clearer,
And so dumb was the hall, you might hear the roar
Of the sea in its pauses grow nearer and drearer.
And . . . hush! hush! hush!
O was it the wind? or was it the rush
Of the restless waters that tumble and splash
On the wild sea-rocks? or was it the crash
Of stones on the old wet bridge up there?
Or the sound of the tempest come over the main?
—Nay, but just now the night was fair.
Was it the march of the midnight rain
Clattering down in the courts? or the crash
Of armour yonder? . . . Listen again!

Can it be lightning?—can it be thunder?
For a light is all round the lurid hall

That reddens and reddens the windows all,
And far away you may hear the fall
As of rafter and boulder splitting asunder.
It is not the thunder, and it is not the lightning
To which the castle is sounding and brightening,
But something worse than lightning or thunder;
For what is this that is coming yonder?

Which way? Here! Where?
Call the men! . . . Is it there?
Call them out! Ring the bell!
Ring the Fiend back to Hell!
Ring, ring the alarum for mercy! . . . Too late!
It has crawl'd up the walls—it has burst in the gate—
It looks thro' the windows—it creeps near the hall—
Near, more near—red and clear—
It is here!
Now the saints save us all!

And little, in truth boots it ringing the bell.
For the fire is loose on its way one may tell
By the hot simmering whispers and humming up there
In the oak-beams and rafters. Now one of the Squires
His elbow hath thrust thro' the half-smoulder'd door—
Such a hole as some rat for his brown wife might bore—
And straightway in snaky, white, wavering spires
The thin smoke twirls thro', and spreads eddying in gyres
Here and there toucht with vanishing tints from the glare
That has swathed in its rose-light the sharp turret stair.
Soon the door ruin'd thro': and in tumbled a cloud

Of black vapour. And first 'twas all blackness, and then
The quick forkëd fires leapt out from their shroud
In the blackness: and thro' it rush'd in the arm'd men
From the courtyard. And then there was flying and fighting,
And praying and cursing—confusion confounded.
Each man, at wild hazard, thro' smoke ramparts smiting,
Has struck . . . is it friend? is it foe? Who is wounded?

But the Earl—who last saw him? Who cares? who knows?
Some one, no doubt, by the weight of his blows.
And they all, at times, heard his oath—so they swore:—
Such a cry as some spear'd wild beast might give vent to,
When the lean dogs are on him, and forth with that roar
Of desolate wrath, the life is sent too.
If he die, he will die with the dying about him,
And his red wet sword in his hand, never doubt him:
If he live, perchance he will bear his new bride
Thro' them all, past the bridge, to the wild sea-side.
And there, whether he leave, or keep his wife still,
There's the free sea round him, new lands, and new life still.
And . . . but ah, the red light there! And high up and higher
The soft, warm, vivid sparkles crowd kindling, and wander
Far away down the breathless blue cone of the night.
Saints! can it be that the ships are on fire,

Those fierce hot clots of crimson light,
Brightening, whitening in the distance yonder?
Slowly over the slumbrous dark
Up from those fountains of fire spark on spark
(You might count them almost) floats silent: and clear
In the steadfast glow the great cross beams,
And the sharp and delicate masts show black;
While wider and higher the red light streams,
And oozes, and overflows at the back.
Then faint thro' the distance a sound you hear,
And the bare poles totter and disappear.

Of the Earl, in truth, the Seneschal swore
(And over the ocean this tale he bore)
That when, as he fled on that last wild night,
He had gain'd the other side of the moat,
Dripping, he shook off his wet leathern coat,
And turning round beheld, from basement
To cope, the castle swathed in light,
And, reveal'd in the glare thro' My Lady's casement,
He saw, or dream'd he saw, this sight—

Two forms (and one for the Earl's he knew,
By the long shaggy beard and the broad back too)
Struggling, grappling, like things half human.
The other, he said, he but vaguely distinguish'd,
When a sound like the shriek of an agonized woman
Made him shudder, and lo, all the vision was gone!
Ceiling and floor had fallen thro',
In a glut of vomited flame extinguish'd;
And the still fire rose and broaden'd on.

How fearful a thing is fire!
You might make up your mind to die by water
A slow cool death—nay, at times, when weary
Of pains that pass not, and pleasures that pall,

When the temples throb, and the heart is dreary,
And life is dried up, you could even desire
Thro' the flat green weeds to fall and fall
Half-asleep down the green light under them all,
As in a dream, while all things seem
Wavering, wavering, to feel the stream
Wind, and gurgle, and sound and gleam.
And who would very much fear to expire
By steel, in the front of victorious slaughter,
The blithe battle about him, and comrades in call?
But to die by fire——
O that night in the hall!

And the castle burn'd from base to top.
You had thought that the fire would never stop,
For it roar'd like the great north wind in the pines,
And shone as the boreal meteor shines
Watch'd by wild hunters in shuddering bands,
When wolves are about in the icy lands.
From the sea you might mark for a space of three days,
Or fainter, or fiercer, the dull red blaze.
And when this ceased, the smoke above it
Hung so heavy not even the wind seem'd to move it;
So it glared and groan'd, and night after night
Smoulder'd—a terrible beacon-light.

Now the Earl's old minstrel—he that had sung
His youth out in those halls—the man beloved,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
They bore him out from the fire; but he roved
Back to the stifled courts; and there
They watch'd him hovering, day after day,
To and fro', with his long white hair
And his gold harp, chanting a lonely lay;
Chanting and changing it o'er and o'er,
Like the mournful mad melodious breath
Of some wild swan singing himself to death,

As he floats down a strange land leagues away.
One day the song ceased. They heard it no more.

Did you ever an Alpine eagle see
Come down from flying near the sun
To find his eyrie all undone
On lonely cliffs where chance hath led
Some spying thief the brood to plunder?
How hangs he desolate overhead,
And circling now aloft, now under,
His ruin'd home screams round and round,
Then drops flat fluttering to the ground.
So moaning round the roofs they saw him,
With his gleaming harp and his vesture white:
Going, and coming, and ever returning
To those chambers, emptied of beauty and state
And chok'd with blackness and ruin and burning,
Then, as some instinct seem'd to draw him,
Like hidden hands, down to his fate,
He paused, plunged, dropp'd forever from sight;
And a cone of smoke and sparkles roll'd up,
As out of some troubled crater-cup.

As for the rest, some died; some fled
Over the sea, nor ever return'd.
But until to the living return the dead
And they each shall stand and take their station
Again at the last great conflagration,
Never more will be seen the Earl or the stranger.
No doubt there is much here that's fit to be burn'd.
Christ save us all in that day from the danger!

And this is why these fishermen say,
Sitting alone in their boats on the bay,
When the moon is low in the wild windy nights,
They hear strange sounds, and see strange sights.
Spectres gathering all forlorn
Under the boughs of this bare black thorn.

A SOUL'S LOSS.

"If Beauty have a soul this is not she."—
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

'TWIXT the Future and the Past
There's a moment. It is o'er.
Kiss sad hands! we part at last.
I am on the other shore.
Fly stern Hour! and hasten fast.
Nobler things are gone before.

From the dark of dying years
Grows a face with violet eyes,
Tremulous thro' tender tears—
Warm lips heavy with rich sighs—
Ah, they fade! it disappears,
And with it my whole heart dies!

Dies . . . . and this chok'd world is sickening.
Truth has nowhere room for breath.
Crusts of falsehood, slowly thickening
From the rottenness beneath
These rank social forms, are quickening
To a loathsome life-in-death.

O those devil's-marketplaces!
Knowing, nightly, she was there,
Can I marvel that the traces
On her spirit are not fair?
I forgot that air debases
When I knew she breath'd such air.

This a fair immortal spirit
For which God prepared his spheres?

What! shall this the stars inherit?
And the worth of honest tears?
A fool's fancy all its merit!
A fool's judgment all its fears!

No, she loves no other! No,
That is lost which she gave me.
Is this comfort—that I know
All her spirit's poverty?
When that dry soul is drain'd low,
His who wills the dregs may be!

Peace! I trust a heart forlorn
Weakly upon boisterous speech.
Pity were more fit than scorn.
Finger'd moth, and bloomless peach!
Gather'd rose without a thorn,
Set to fleer in all men's reach!

I am cloth'd with her disgrace.
O her shame is made my own!
O I reel from my high place!
All belief is overthrown.
What! This whirligig of lace,
This the Queen that I have known?

Starry Queen that did confer
Beauty on the barren earth!
Woodlands, wander'd oft with her
In her sadness and her mirth,
Feeling her ripe influence stir
Brought the violets to birth.

The great golden clouds of even,
They, too, knew her, and the host
Of the eternal stars in heaven;
And I deem'd I knew her most.
I, to whom the Word was given
How archangels have been lost!

Given in vain! . . . But all is over!
Every spell that bound me broken!
In her eyes I can discover
Of that perisht soul no token.
I can neither hate nor love her.
All my loss must be unspoken.

Mourn I may, that from her features
All the angel light is gone.
But I chide not. Human creatures
Are not angels. She was none.
Women have so many natures!
I think she loved me well with one.

All is not with love departed.
Life remains, tho' toucht with scorn.
Lonely, but not broken-hearted.
Nature changes not. The morn
Breathes not sadder. Buds have started
To white clusters on the thorn.

And to-morrow I shall see
How the leaves their green silk sheath
Have burst upon the chestnut-tree.
And the white rose-bush beneath
My lattice which, once tending, she
Made thrice sweeter with her breath,

Its black buds thro' moss and glue
Will swell greener. And at eve
Winking bats will waver thro'
The gray warmth from eave to eave,
While the daisy gathers dew.
These things grieve not, tho' I grieve.

What of that? Deep Nature's gladness
Does not help this grief to less.
And the stars will show no sadness,
And the flowers no heaviness,

Tho' each thought should turn to madness
  Neath the strain of its distress!

No, if life seem lone to me,
  'Tis scarce lonelier than at first.
Lonely natures there must be.
  Eagles are so. I was nurst
Far from love in infancy:
  I have sought to slake my thirst

At high founts; to fly alone,
  Haunt the heaven, and soar, and sing.
Earth's warm joys I have not known.
  This one heart held everything.
Now my eirie is o'erthrown!
  As of old, I spread the wing,

And rise up to meet my fate
  With a yet unbroken will.
When Heaven shut up Eden-gate
  Man was given the earth to till.
There's a world to cultivate,
  And a solitude to fill.

Welcome man's old helpmate, Toil!
  How may this heart's hurt be heal'd?
Crush the olive into oil;
  Turn the ploughshare; sow the field.
All are tillers of the soil.
  Each some harvest hopes to yield.

Shall I perish with the whole
  Of the coming years in view
Unattempted? To the soul
  Every hour brings something new.
Still suns rise: still ages roll.
  Still some deed is left to do.

Some . . . but what? Small matter now
  For one lily for her hair,

For one rose to wreathe her brow,
For one gem to sparkle there,
I had . . . words, old words, I know!
What was I, that she should care

How I differ'd from the common
Crowd that thrills not to her touch?
How I deem'd her more than human,
And had died to crown her such?
They? To them she is mere woman.
Oh, her loss and mine is much!

Fool, she haunts me still! No wonder!
Not a bud on yon black bed,
Not a swathëd lily yonder,
But recalls some fragrance fled!
Here, what marvel I should ponder
On the last word which she said?

I must seek some other place
Where free Nature knows her not:
Where I shall not meet her face
In each old familiar spot.
There is comfort left in space.
Even this grief may be forgot.

Great men reach dead hands unto me
From the graves to comfort me.
Shakespeare's heart is throbbing thro' me.
All man has been man may be.
Plato speaks like one that knew me.
Life is made Philosophy.

Ah, no, no! while yet the leaf
Turns, the truth upon its pall.
By the stature of this grief,
Even Shakespeare shows so small!
Plato palters with relief.
Grief is greater than them all!

They were pedants who could speak.
Grander souls have past unheard:
Such as found all language weak;
Choosing rather to record
Secrets before Heaven: nor break
Faith with angels by a word.

And Heaven heeds this wretchedness
Which I suffer. Let it be.
Would that I could love thee less!
I, too, am dragg'd down by thee.
Thine—in weakness—thine—ah yes!
Yet farewell eternally.

Child, I have no lips to chide thee.
Take the blessing of a heart
(Never more to beat beside thee!)
Which in blessing breaks. Depart.
Farewell! I that deified thee
Dare not question what thou art.

THE ARTIST.

O Artist, range not over-wide:
Lest what thou seek be haply hid
In bramble-blossoms at thy side,
Or shut within the daisy-lid.

God's glory lies not out of reach.
The moss we crush beneath our feet,
The pebbles on the wet sea-beach,
Have solemn meanings strange and sweet.

The peasant at his cottage door
May teach thee more than Plato knew:
See that thou scorn him not: adore
God in him, and thy nature too.

Know well thy friends. The woodbine's breath,
The woolly tendril on the vine,
Are more to thee than Cato's death,
Or Cicero's words to Catiline.

The wild rose is thy next in blood:
Share Nature with her, and thy heart.
The kingcups are thy sisterhood:
Consult them duly on thine art.

Nor cross the sea for gems. Nor seek:
Be sought. Fear not to dwell alone.
Possess thyself. Be proudly-meek.
See thou be worthy to be known.

The Genius on thy daily ways
Shall meet, and take thee by the hand:
But serve him not as who obeys:
He is thy slave if thou command:

And blossoms on the blackberry-stalks
He shall enchant as thou dost pass,
Till they drop gold upon thy walks,
And diamonds in the dewy grass.

Such largess of the liberal bowers
From left to right is grandly flung,
What time their subject blooms and flowers
King-Poets walk in state among.

Be quiet. Take things as they come:
Each hour will draw out some surprise.
With blessing let the days go home:
Thou shalt have thanks from evening skies.

Lean not on one mind constantly:
Lest, where one stood before, two fall.
Something God hath to say to thee
Worth hearing from the lips of all.

All things are thine estate: yet must
Thou first display the title-deeds,
And sue the world. Be strong: and trust
High instincts more than all the creeds.

The world of Thought is pack'd so tight,
If thou stand up another tumbles:
Heed it not, tho' thou have to fight
With giants: whoso follows stumbles.

Assert thyself: and by-and-by
The world will come and lean on thee.
But seek not praise of men: thereby
Shall false shows cheat thee. Boldly be.

Each man was worthy at the first:
God spake to us ere we were born:
But we forget. The land is curst:
We plant the brier, reap the thorn.

Remember, every man He made
Is different: has some deed to do,
Some work to work. Be undismay'd,
Tho' thine be humble: do it too.

Not all the wisdom of the schools
Is wise for thee. Hast thou to speak?
No man hath spoken for thee. Rules
Are well: but never fear to break

The scaffolding of other souls:
It was not meant for thee to mount;
Tho' it may serve thee. Separate wholes
Make up the sum of God's account.

Earth's number-scale is near us set;
The total God alone can see;
But each some fraction: shall I fret
If you see Four where I saw Three?

A unit's loss the sum would mar;
  Therefore if I have One or Two,
I am as rich as others are,
  And help the whole as well as you.

This wild white rose-bud in my hand
  Hath meanings meant for me alone,
Which no one else can understand:
  To you it breathes with alter'd tone:

How shall I class its properties
  For you? or its wise whisperings
Interpret? Other ears and eyes
  It teaches many other things.

We number daisies, fringe and star:
  We count the cinqfoils and the poppies:
We know not what they mean. We are
  Degenerate copyists of copies.

We go to Nature, not as lords,
  But servants: and she treats us thus:
Speaks to us with indifferent words,
  And from a distance looks at us.

Let us go boldly, as we ought,
  And say to her "We are a part
Of that supreme original Thought
  Which did conceive thee what thou art:

"We will not have this lofty look:
  Thou shalt fall down, and recognize
Thy kings: we will write in thy book,
  Command thee with our eyes."

She hath usurpt us. She should be
  Our model: but we have become
Her miniature-painters. So when we
  Entreat her softly she is dumb.

Nor serve the subject overmuch :
  Nor rhythm and rhyme, nor colour and form :
Know Truth hath all great graces, such
  As shall with these thy work inform.

We ransack History's tatter'd page :
  We prate of epoch and costume :
Call this, and that, the Classic Age :
  Choose tunic now, now helm and plume :

But while we halt in weak debate
  'Twixt that and this appropriate theme,
The offended wild-flowers stare and wait,
  The bird hoots at us from the stream.

Next, as to laws. What's beautiful
  We recognize in form and face :
And judge it thus, and thus, by rule,
  As perfect law brings perfect grace :

If thro' the effect we drag the cause,
  Dissect, divide, anatomize,
Results are lost in loathsome laws,
  And all the ancient beauty dies :

Till we, instead of bloom and light,
  See only sinews, nerves, and veins :
Nor will the effect and cause unite,
  For one is lost if one remains :

But from some higher point behold
  This dense, perplexing, complication ;
And laws involved in laws unfold,
  And orb into thy contemplation.

God, when he made the seed, conceived
  The flower ; and all the work of sun
And rain, before the stem was leaved,
  In that prenatal thought was done :

The girl who twines in her soft hair
The orange-flower, with love's devotion,
By the mere act of being fair
Sets countless laws of life in motion :

So thou, by one thought thoroughly great,
Shalt, without heed thereto, fulfil
All laws of art. Create ! create !
Dissection leaves the dead dead still.

All Sciences are branches, each,
Of that first science—Wisdom. Seize
The true point whence, if thou shouldst reach
Thine arm out, thou may'st grasp all these,

And close all knowledge in thy palm.
As History proves Philosophy :
Philosophy, with warnings calm,
Prophet-like, guiding History.

Burn catalogues. Write thine own books.
What need to pore o'er Greece and Rome ?
When whoso thro' his own life looks
Shall find that he is fully come

Thro' Greece and Rome, and Middle-Age :
Hath been by turns, ere yet full-grown,
Soldier, and Senator, and Sage,
And worn the tunic and the gown.

Cut the world thoroughly to the heart.
The sweet and bitter kernel crack.
Have no half-dealings with thine art.
All heaven is waiting : turn not back.

If all the world for thee and me
One solitary shape possess'd,
What shall I say ? a single tree—
Whereby to type and hint the rest,

And I could imitate the bark
  And foliage, both in form and hue,
Or silvery-gray, or brown and dark,
  Or rough with moss, or wet with dew,

But thou, with one form in thine eye,
  Couldst penetrate all forms : possess
The soul of form : and multiply
  A million like it, more or less,

Which were the Artist of us twain ?
  The moral's clear to understand.
Where'er we walk, by hill or plain,
  Is there no mystery on the land ?

The osier'd, oosy water, ruffled
  By fluttering swifts that dip and wink :
Deep cattle in the cowslips muffled,
  Or lazy-eyed upon the brink :

Or, when—a scroll of stars—the night
  (By God withdrawn), is roll'd away,
The silent sun, on some cold height,
  Breaking the great seal of the day :

Are these not words more rich than ours ?
  O seize their import if you can !
Our souls are parch'd like withering flowers.
  Our knowledge ends where it began.

While yet about us fall God's dews,
  And whisper secrets o'er the earth
Worth all the weary years we lose
  In learning legends of our birth,

Arise, O Artist ! and restore
  Their music to the moaning winds,
Love's broken pearls to life's bare shore,
  And freshness to our fainting minds.

THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

I.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE FLIGHT.]

TAKE the diamonds from my hair!
  Take the flowers from the urn!
Fling the lattice wide! more air!
  Air—more air, or else I burn!

Put the bracelets by. And thrust
  Out of sight these hated pearls.
I could trample them to dust,
  Tho' they *were* his gift, the Earl's!

Flusht I am? The dance it was.
  Only that. Now leave me, Sweet.
Take the flowers, Love, because
  They will wither in this heat.

Good night, dearest! Leave the door
  Half-way open as you go.
—Oh, thank God! . . . Alone once more.
  Am I dreaming? . . . Dreaming? . . . no!

Still that music underneath
  Works to madness in my brain.
Even the roses seem to breathe
  Poison'd perfumes, full of pain.

Let me think . . . my head is aching.
  I have little strength to think.
And I know my heart is breaking.
  Yet, O love, I will not shrink!

In his look was such sweet sadness.
  And he fix'd that look on me.
I was helpless . . . call it madness,
  Call it guilt . . . but it must be.

I can bear it, if, in losing
All things else, I lose him not.
All the grief is my own choosing.
Can I murmur at my lot?

Ah, the night is bright and still
Over all the fields I know.
And the chestnuts on the hill:
And the quiet lake below.

By that lake I yet remember
How, last year, we stood together
One wild eve in warm September
Bright with thunder: not a feather

Stirr'd the slumbrous swans that floated
Past the reed-beds, husht and white:
Towers of sultry cloud hung moated
In the lake's unshaken light:

Far behind us all the extensive
Woodland blacken'd against heaven:
And we spoke not:—pausing pensive:
Till the thunder-cloud was riven,

And the black wood whiten'd under,
And the storm began to roll,
And the love laid up like thunder
Burst at once upon my soul.

There! . . . the moon is just in crescent
In the silent happy sky.
And to-night the meanest peasant
In her light's more blest than I.

Other moons I soon shall see
Over Asian headlands green:
Ocean-spaces sparkling free
Isles of breathless balm between:

And the rosy-rising star
  At the setting of the day
From the distant sandy bar
  Shining over Africa:

Steering thro' the glowing weather
  Past the tracts of crimson light,
Down the sunset lost together
  Far athwart the summer night.

"Canst thou make such life thy choice
  My heart's own, my chosen one?"
So he whisper'd and his voice
  Had such magic in its tone!

But one hour ago we parted.
  And we meet again to-morrow.
Parted—silent, and sad-hearted:
  And we meet—in guilt and sorrow.

But we *shall* meet . . . meet, O God,
  To part never . . . the last time!
Yes! the Ordeal shall be trod.
  Burning ploughshares—love and crime!

O with him, with him to wander
  Thro' the wide world—only his!
Heart and hope and heaven to squander
  On the wild wealth of his kiss!

Then? . . . like these poor flowers that wither
  In my bosom, to be thrown
Lightly from him any whither
  When the sweetness all is flown?

Oh I know it all, my fate!
  But the gulf is crost forever.
And regret is born too late.
  The shut Past reopens never.

Fear? . . . I cannot fear! for fear
  Dies with hope in every breast,
Oh I see the frozen sneer,
  Careless smile, and callous jest!

But my shame shall yet be worn
  Like the purple of a Queen.
I can answer scorn with scorn.
  Fool! I know not what I mean.

Yet beneath his smile (*his* smile!)
  Smiles less kind I shall not see.
Let the whole wide world revile.
  He is all the world to me.

So to-night all hopes, all fears,
  All the bright and brief array
Of my lost youth's happier years,
  With these gems I put away.

Gone! . . . so . . . one by one . . . all gone!
  Not one jewel I retain
Of my life's wealth. All alone
  I tread boldly o'er my pain

On to him . . . Ah, me! my child—
  My own fair-hair'd, darling boy!
In his sleep just now he smiled.
  All his dreams are dreams of joy.

How those soft long lashes shade
  That young cheek so husht and warm,
Like a half-blown rosebud laid
  On the little dimpled arm!

He will wake without a mother.
  He will hate me when he hears
From the cold lips of another
  All my faults in after years.

None will tell the deep devotion
  Wherewith I have brooded o'er
His young life, since its first motion
  Made me hope and pray once more.

On my breast he smiled and slept,
  Smiled between my wrongs and me,
Till the weak warm tears I wept
  Set my dry, coil'd nature free.

Nay, . . . my feverish kiss would wake him.
  How can I dare bless his sleep?
They will change him soon, and make him
  Like themselves that never weep;

Fitted to the world's bad part:
  Yet, will all their wealth afford him
Aught more rich than this lost heart
  Whose last anguish yearns toward him?

Ah, there's none will love him then
  As I love that leave him now!
He will mix with selfish men.
  Yes, he has his father's brow!

Lie thou there, thou poor rose-blossom,
  In that little hand more light
Than upon this restless bosom,
  Whose last gift is given to-night.

God forgive me!—My God cherish
  His lone motherless infancy!
Would to-night that I might perish!
  But heaven will not let me die.

O love! love! but this is bitter!
  O that we had never met!
O but hate than love were fitter!
  And he too may hate me yet.

Yet to him have I not given
All life's sweetness? . . . fame? and name?
Hope? and happiness? and heaven?
Can he hate me for my shame?

"Child," he said, "thy life was glad
In the dawning of its years;
And love's morn should be less sad,
For his eve may close in tears.

"Sweet in novel lands," he said,
"Day by day to share delight;
On by soft surprises led,
And together rest at night.

"We will see the shores of Greece,
And the temples of the Nile:
Sail where summer suns increase
Toward the south from isle to isle.

"Track the first star that swims on
Glowing depths toward night and us,
While the heats of sunset crimson
All the purple Bosphorus.

"Leaning o'er some dark ship-side,
Watch the wane of mighty moons;
Or thro' starlit Venice glide,
Singing down the blue lagoons.

"So from coast to coast we'll range,
Growing nearer as we move
On our charm'd way; each soft change
Only deepening changeless love."

'Twas the dream which I, too, dream'd
Once, long since, in days of yore.
Life's long-faded fancies seem'd
At his words to bloom once more.

The old hope, the wreckt belief,
The lost light of vanisht years,
Ere my heart was worn with grief,
Or my eyes were dimm'd with tear !

When a careless girl I clung
With proud trust to my own powers;
Ah, long since I, too, was young,
I, too, dream'd of happier hours !

Whether this may yet be so,
(Truth or dream) I cannot tell.
But where'er his footsteps go
Turns my heart, I feel too well.

Ha ! the long night wears away.
Yon cold drowsy star grows dim.
The long fear'd, long wisht-for, day
Comes, when I shall fly with him.

In the laurel wakes the thrush.
Thro' these dreaming chambers wide
Not a sound is stirring. Hush;
—Oh, it was my child that cried !

II.

THE PORTRAIT.

Yes, 'tis she ! Those eyes ! that hair
With the selfsame wondrous hue !
And that smile—which was so fair,
Is it strange I deemed it true ?

Years, years, years I have not drawn
  Back this curtain! there she stands
By the terrace on the lawn,
  With the white rose in her hands:

And about her the armorial
  Scutcheons of a haughty race,
Graven each with its memorial
  Of the old Lords of the Place.

You, who do profess to see
  In the face the written mind,
Look in that face, and tell me
  In what part of it you find

All the falsehood, and the wrong,
  And the sin, which must have been
Hid in baleful beauty long,
  Like the worm that lurks unseen

In the shut heart of the flower.
  'Tis the Sex, no doubt! And still
Some may lack the means, the power,
  There's not one that lacks the will.

Their own way they seek the Devil,
  Ever prone to the deceiver!
If too deep I feel this evil
  And this shame, may God forgive her!

For I loved her,—loved, ay, loved her
  As a man just once may love.
I so trusted, so approved her,
  Set her, blindly, so above

This poor world which was about her!
  And (so loving her) because,
With a faith too high to doubt her,
  I, forsooth, but seldom was

At her feet with clamorous praises
And protested tenderness
(These things some men can do) phrases
On her face, perhaps her dress,

Or the flower she chose to braid
In her hair—because, you see,
Thinking love's best proved unsaid,
And by words the dignity

Of true feeling's often lost,
I was vow'd to life's broad duty;
Man's great business uppermost
In my mind, not woman's beauty;

Toiling still to win for her
Honour, fortune, state in life
("Too much with the Minister,
And too little with the wife!")

Just for this, she flung aside
All my toil, my heart, my name;
Trampled on my ancient pride,
Turned my honour into shame.

Oh, if this old coronet
Weigh'd too hard on her young brow,
Need she thus dishonour it,
Fling it in the dust so low?

But 'tis just these women's way—
All the same the wide world over!
Fool'd by what's most worthless, they
Cheat in turn the honest lover.

And I was not, I thank heaven,
Made, as some, to read them thro',
Were life three times longer even,
There are better things to do.

No! to let a woman lie
  Like a canker, at the roots
Of a man's life,—burn it dry,
  Nip the blossom, stunt the fruits,

This I count both shame and thrall!
  Who is free to let one creature
Come between himself, and all
  The true process of his nature,

While across the world the nations
  Call to us that we should share
In their griefs, their exultations?—
  All they will be, all they are!

And so much yet to be done—
  Wrong to root out, good to strengthen!
Such hard battles to be won!
  Such long glories yet to lengthen!

'Mid all these, how small one grief—
  One wreck'd heart, whose hopes are o'er!
For myself I scorn relief.
  For the people I claim more.

Strange! these crowds whose instincts guide them
  Fail to get the thing they would,
Till we nobles stand beside them,
  Give our names, or shed our blood.

From of old this hath been so.
  For we too were with the first
In the fight fought long ago
  When the chain of Charles was burst.

Who but we set Freedom's border
  Wrench'd at Runnymede from John?
Who but we stand, towers of order,
  'Twixt the red cap and the Throne?

And they wrong us, England's Peers,
Us, the vanguard of the land,
Who should say the march of years
Makes us shrink at Truth's right hand.

'Mid the armies of Reform,
To the People's cause allied,
We—the forces of the storm!
We—the planets of the tide!

Do I seem too much to fret
At my own peculiar woe?
Would to heaven I could forget
How I loved her long ago!

As a father loves a child,
So I loved her:—rather thus
Than as youth loves, when our wild
New-found passions master us.

And—for I was proud of old
('Tis my nature)—doubtless she
In the man so calm, so cold,
All the heart's warmth could not see.

Nay, I blame myself—nor lightly.
Whose chief duty was to guide
Her young careless life more rightly
Thro' the perils at her side.

Ah, but love is blind! and I
Loved her blindly, blindly!... Well,
Who that ere loved trustfully
Such strange danger could foretell?

As some consecrated cup
On its saintly shrine secure,
All my life seem'd lifted up
On that heart I deem'd so pure.

Well, for me there yet remains
  Labour—that's much: then, the state:
And, what pays a thousand pains,
  Sense of right and scorn of fate.

And, oh, more! . . . my own brave boy,
  With his frank and eager brow,
And his hearty innocent joy.
  For as yet he does not know

All the wrong his mother did.
  Would that this might pass unknown!
For his young years God forbid
  I should darken by my own.

Yet this must come . . . But I mean
  He shall be, as time moves on,
All his mother might have been,
  Comfort, counsel—both in one.

Doubtless, first, in that which moved me
  Man's strong natural wrath had part.
Wrong'd by one I deem'd had loved me,
  For I loved her from my heart!

But that's past! If I was sore
  To the heart, and blind with shame,
I see calmly now. Nay, more—
  For I pity where I blame.

For, if he betray or grieve her,
  What is hers to turn to still?
And at last, when he shall leave her,
  As at last he surely will,

Where shall she find refuge? what
  That worst widowhood can soothe?
For the Past consoles her not,
  Nor the memories of her youth,

Neither that which in the dust
She hath flung—the name she bore;
But with her own shame she must
Dwell forsaken evermore.

Nothing left but years of anguish,
And remorse but not return:
Of her own self-hate to languish:
For her long-lost peace to yearn:

Or, yet worse beyond all measure,
Starting from wild reveries,
Drain the poison misnamed Pleasure,
And laugh drunken on the lees.

O false heart! O woman, woman,
Woman! would thy treachery
Had been less! For surely no man
Better loved than I loved thee.

We must never meet again.
Even shouldst thou repent the past.
Both must suffer: both feel pain:
Ere God pardon both at last.

Farewell, thou false face! Life speeds me
On its duties. I must fight:
I must toil. The People needs me:
And I speak for them to-night.

III.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

THANKS, Dear! Put the lamp down . . . . so!
For my eyes are weak and dim.
How the shadows come and go!
Speak truth—have they sent for him?

Yes? thank Heaven! And he will come,
Come and watch my dying hour—
Tho' I left and shamed his home.
—I am wither'd like this flower

Which he gave me long ago.
'Twas upon my bridal eve,
When I swore to love him so
As a wife should—smile or grieve

With him, for him—and not shrink.
And now? . . . . . O the long, long pain!
See this sunken cheek! You think
He would know my face again?

All its wretched beauty gone!
Only the deep care survives.
Ah, could years of grief atone
For those fatal hours! . . . . . It drives

Past the pain, the bitter blast!
In this garret one might freeze.
Hark there! wheels below! At last
He is come then? No . . . the trees

And the night-wind—nothing more!
Set the chair for him to sit,
When he comes. And close the door,
For the gust blows cold thro' it.

When I think, I can remember
I was born in castle halls—
How yon dull and dying ember
Glares against the whitewasht walls!

If he come not (but you said
That the messenger was sent
Long since?) Tell him when I'm dead
How my life's last hours were spent

In repenting that life's sin,
And . . . . . the room grows strangely dark!
See, the rain is oozing in.
Set the lamp down nearer. Hark,

Footsteps, footsteps on the stairs!
His . . . no, no! 'twas *not* the wind.
God, I know, has heard my prayers.
We shall meet. I am resign'd.

Prop me up upon the pillows.
Will he come to my bedside?
Once 'twas his . . . . Among the willows
How the water seems to glide!

Past the woods, the farms, the towers,
It seems gliding, gliding thro'.
"*Dearest see, these young June-flowers,*
I have pluckt them all for you,

Here, where pass'd my boyhood musing
On the bride which I might wed."
Ah, it goes now! I am losing
All things. What was that he said?

Say, where am I? . . . this strange room?

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Ah, his voice! I knew it.
But this place? . . . . Is this the tomb,
With the cold dews creeping thro' it?

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Will you stand
Near me? Sit down. Do not stir.
Tell me, may I take your hand?
Tell me, will you look on her

Who so wrong'd you? I have wept
O such tears for that sin's sake!
And that thought has never slept,—
But it lies here, like a snake,

In my bosom—gnawing, gnawing
All my life up! I had meant,
Could I live yet .... Death is drawing
Near me—

THE EARL.

God, thy punishment!

Dare I judge her?—

GERTRUDE.

O, believe me,
'Twas a dream, a hideous dream.
And I wake now. Do not leave me.
I am dying. All things seem

Failing from me—even my breath!
But my sentence is from old.
Sin came first upon me. Death
Follows sin, soon, soon! Behold,

Dying thus! Ah, why didst leave
Lonely Love's lost bridal bowers
Where I found the snake, like Eve,
Unsuspected 'mid the flowers?

Had I been some poor man's bride
I had shared with love his lot:
Labour'd truly by his side,
And made glad his lowly cot.

I had been content to mate
Love with labour's sunburnt brows.
But to be a thing of state—
Homeless in a husband's house!

In the gorgeous game—the strife
For the dazzling prize—that moved you,
Love seemed crowded out of life—

THE EARL.

Ah fool! and I loved you, loved you!

GERTRUDE.

Yes. I see it all at last—
All in ruins. I can dare
To gaze down o'er my lost past
From these heights of my despair.

Oh, when all seem'd grown most drear—
I was weak—I cannot tell—
But the serpent in my ear
Whisper'd, whisper'd—and I fell.

Look around, now. Does it cheer you
This strange place? the wasted frame
Of the dying woman near you,
Weigh'd into her grave by shame?

Can you trace in this wan form
Aught resembling that young girl's
Whom you loved once? See, this arm—
Shrunken, shrunken! And my curls,

They have cut them all away.
And my brows are worn with woe.
Would you, looking at me, say
She was lovely long ago?

Husband, answer! In all these
Are you not avenged? If I
Could rise now, upon my knees,
At your feet, before I die,

I would fall down in my sorrow
And my shame, and say "forgive,"
That which will be dust to-morrow,
This weak clay!

THE EARL.

Poor sufferer, live!

God forgives. Shall I not so?

GERTRUDE.

Nay, a better life, in truth,
I do hope for. Not below.
Partner of my perisht youth,

Husband, wrong'd one! Let your blessing
Be with me, before, to-night,
From the life that's past redressing
This stray'd soul must take its flight!

Tears, warm tears! I feel them creep
Down my cheek. Tears—not my own.
It is long since I could weep.
Past all tears my grief hath grown.

Over this dry wither'd cheek,
Drop by drop, I feel them fall.
But my voice is growing weak:
And I have not spoken all.

I had much to say My son,
My lost child that never knew me!
Is he like me? One by one,
All his little ways come to me.

Is he grown? I fancy him!
How that childish face comes back
O'er my memory sweet and dim!
And his long hair? Is it black?

Or as mine was once? His mother
Did he ever ask to see?
Has he grown to love another—
Some strange woman not like me?

Would he shudder to behold
This pale face and faded form
If he knew, in days of old,
How he slumber'd on my arm?

How I nurst him? loved him? miss'd him
All this long heartbroken time?
It is years since last I kiss'd him.
Does he hate me for my crime?

I had meant to send some token—
If, indeed, I dared to send it.
This old chain—the links are broken—
Like my life—I could not mend it.

Husband, husband! I am dying,
Dying! Let me feel your kiss
On my brow where I am lying.
You are great enough for this!

And you'll lay me, when I'm gone,
—Not in those old sculptured walls!
Let no name be carved—no stone—
No ancestral funerals!

In some little grave of grass
  Anywhere, you'll let me lie:
Where the nightwinds only pass,
  Or the clouds go floating by;

Where my shame may be forgot;
  And the story of my life
And my sin remember'd not.
  So forget the faithless wife;

Or if, haply, when I'm dead,
  On some worthier happier breast
Than mine was, you lean your head,
  Should one thought of me molest

Those calm hours, recall me only
  As you see me—worn with tears:
Dying desolate here; left lonely
  By the overthrow of years.

May I lay my arm, then, there?
  Does it not seem strange to you,
This old hand among your hair?
  And these wasted fingers too?

How the lamp wanes! All grows dark—
  Dark and strange. Yet now there shined
Something past me . . . . Husband, hark!
  There are voices on the wind.

Are they come? and do they ask me
  For the songs we used to sing?
Strange that memory thus should task me!
  Listen—
Birds are on the wing:

And thy Birthday Morn is rising.
  May it ever rise as bright!
Wake not yet! The day's devising
  Fair new things for thy delight.

Wake not yet! Last night this flower
Near thy porch began to pout
From its warm sheath: in an hour
All the young leaves will be out.

Wake not yet! So dear thou art, love,
That I grudge these buds the bliss
Each will bring to thy young heart, love,
I would claim all for my kiss.

Wake not yet!
—There now, it fails me!
Is my lord there? I am ill.
And I cannot tell what ails me.
Husband! Is he near me still?

Oh, this anguish seems to crush
All my life up—body and mind!

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Hush!
There are voices in the wind.

THE EARL.

Still she wanders! Ah, the plucking
At the sheet!

GERTRUDE.

Hist! do not take it
From my bosom. See, 'tis sucking!
If it sleep we must not wake it.

Such a little rosy mouth!
—Not to night, O not to-night!
Did he tell me in the South
That those stars were twice as bright?

Off! away! unhand me—go!
I forgive thee my lost heaven,
And the wrong which thou didst do.
Would my sin, too, were forgiven!

Gone at last! . . . Ah, fancy feigns
These wild visions! I grow weak.
Fast, fast dying! Life's warmth wanes
From me. Is the fire out?

THE EARL.

Speak,
Gertrude, speak! My wife, my wife!
Nay she is not dead,—not dead!
See, the lips move. There is life.
She is choking. Lift her head.

GERTRUDE.

* * * * * *

Death! . . . My eyes grow dim, and dimmer.
I can scarcely see thy face.
But the twilight seems to glimmer,
Lighted from some distant place.

Husband!

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Art thou near me?
On thy breast—once more—thy breast!
I have sinn'd—and—nay, yet hear me,
And repented—and—

THE EARL.

The rest
God hath heard, where now thou art,

Thou poor soul,—in Heaven.
The door—

Close it softly, and depart.
Leave us!
She is mine once more.

MINOR POEMS.

THE PARTING OF LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE.

A FRAGMENT.

Now, as the time wore by to Our Lady's Day,
Spring linger'd in the chambers of the South.
The nightingales were far in fairy lands
Beyond the sunset: but the wet blue woods
Were half aware of violets in the wake
Of morning rains. The swallow still delay'd
To build and be about in noisy roofs,
And March was moaning in the windy elm.

But Arthur's royal purpose held to keep
A joust of arms to solemnize the time
In stately Camelot. So the King sent forth
His heralds, and let cry thro' all the land
That he himself would take the lists, and tilt
Against all comers.
Hither came the chiefs
Of Christendom. The King of Northgalies;
Anguishe, the King of Ireland; the Haut Prince,
Sir Galahault; the King o' the Hundred Knights;
The Kings of Scotland and of Britany;
And many more renownëd knights whereof
The names are glorious. Also all the earls,
And all the dukes, and all the mighty men

And famous heroes of the Table Round,
From far Northumberland to where the wave
Rides rough on Devon from the outer main.
So that there was not seen for seven years,
Since when, at Whitsuntide, Sir Galahad
Departed out of Carlyel from the court,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights.

Then would King Arthur that the Queen should ride
With him from Carlyel to Camelot
To see the jousts. But she, because that yet
The sickness was upon her, answer'd nay.
Then said King Arthur, " This repenteth me.
For never hath been seen for seven years,
No, not since Galahad, at Whitsuntide,
Departed from us out of Carlyel,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights."
But the Queen would not, and the King in wrath
Brake up the court, and rode to Astolat
On this side Camelot.
Now men said the Queen
Tarried behind because of Launcelot,
For Launcelot staid to heal him of his wound.
And there had been estrangement 'twixt these two
I' the later time, because of bitter words.
So when the King with all his fellowship
Was ridden out of Carlyel, the Queen
Arose, and call'd to her Sir Launcelot.

Then to Sir Launcelot spoke Queen Guenevere.

" Not for the memory of that love whereof
No more than memory lives, but, Sir, for that
Which even when love is ended yet endures
Making immortal life with deathless deeds,
Honour—true knighthood's golden spurs, the crown
And priceless diadem of peerless Queens—

I make appeal to you, that hear perchance
The last appeal which I shall ever make.
So weigh my words not lightly! for I feel
The fluttering fires of life grow faint and cold
About my heart. And oft, indeed, to me
Lying whole hours awake in the dead nights
The end seems near, as tho' the darkness knew
The angel waiting there to call my soul
Perchance before the house awakes; and oft
When faint, and all at once, from far away,
The mournful midnight bells begin to sound
Across the river, all the days that were
(Brief, evil days!) return upon my heart,
And, where the sweetness seem'd, I see the sin.
For, waking lone, long hours before the dawn,
Beyond the borders of the dark I seem
To see the twilight of another world,
That grows and grows and glimmers on my gaze.
And oft, when late, before the languorous moon
Thro' yonder windows to the West goes down
Among the pines, deep peace upon me falls,
Deep peace like death, so that I think I know
The blessëd Mary and the righteous saints
Stand at the throne, and intercede for me.
Wherefore these things are thus I cannot tell.
But now I pray you of your feälty,
And by all knightly faith which may be left,
Arise and get you hence, and join the King.
For wherefore hold you thus behind the court,
Seeing my liege the King is moved in wrath?
For wete you well what say your foes and mine.
'See how Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenevere
Do hold them ever thus behind the King
That they may take their pleasure!' Knowing not
How that for me all these delights are come
To be as wither'd violets."

Half in tears
She ceased abrupt. Given up to a proud grief,

Vex'd to be vext. With love and anger moved.
Love toucht with scorn, and anger pierced with love.
About her, all unheeded, her long hair
Loos'd its warm, yellow, waving loveliness,
And o'er her bare and shining shoulder cold
Fell floating free. Upon one full white arm,
To which the amorous purple coverlet
Clung dimpling close, her drooping state was propt.
There, half in shadow of her soft gold curls,
She lean'd, and like a rose enricht with dew,
Whose heart is heavy with the clinging bee,
Bow'd down toward him all her glowing face,
While in the light of her large angry eyes
Uprose, and rose, a slow imperious sorrow,
And o'er the shine of still, unquivering tears
Swam on to him.

But he, with brows averse
And orgolous looks, three times to speech address'd,
Three times in vain. The silence of the place
Fell like a hand upon his heart, and hush'd
His foolish anger with authority.
He would not see the wretched Queen: he saw
Only the hunter on the arrass'd wall
Prepare to wind amort his bugle horn,
And the long daylight dying down the floors.
For halfway through the golden gates of eve
The sun was roll'd. The dropping tapestry glow'd
With awful hues. Far off among his reeds
The river, smitten with a waning light,
Shone: and, behind black lengths of pine reveal'd,
The red West smoulder'd, and the day declined.
Then year by year, as wave on wave a sea,
The tided Past came softly o'er his heart,
And all the days which had been.

So he stood
Long in his mind divided: with himself

At strife: and, like a steed that hotly chafes
His silver bit, which yet some silken rein
Sway'd by a skill'd accustom'd hand restrains,
His heart against the knowledge of its love
Made vain revolt, and fretful rose and sunk.
But at the last, quelling a wayward grief,
That swell'd against all utterance, and sought
To force its salt and sorrowful overflow
Upon weak language, "Now indeed," he cried,
"I see the face of the old time is changed,
And all things alter'd! Will the sun still burn?
Still burn the eternal stars? For love was deem'd
Not less secure than these. Needs should there be
Something remarkable to prove the world
I am no more that Launcelot, nor thou
That Guenevere, of whom, long since, the fame,
Fruitful of noble deeds, with such a light
Did fill this nook and cantle of the earth,
That all great lands of Christendom beside
Show'd darken'd of their glory. But I see
That there is nothing left for men to swear by.
For then thy will did never urge me hence,
But drew me thro' all dangers to thy feet.
And none can say, least thou, I have not been
The staff and burgonet of thy fair fame.
Nor mind you, Madam, how in Surluse once,
When all the estates were met, and noble judges,
Arm'd clean with shields, set round to keep the right,
Before you sitting throned with Galahault
In great array, on fair green quilts of samyte,
Rich, ancient, fringed with gold, seven summer days,
And all before the Earls of Northgalies,
Such service then with this old sword was wrought,
To crown thy beauty in the courts of Fame,
That in that time fell many noble knights,
And all men marvell'd greatly? So when last
The loud horns blew to lodging, and we supp'd

With Palamedes and with Lamorak,
All those great dukes and kings, and famous queens,
Beholding us with a deep joy, avouch'd
Across the golden cups of costly wine
'There is no Queen of love but Guenevere,
And no true knight but Launcelot of the Lake!'"

Thus he, transported by the thought of days
And deeds that, like the mournful martial sounds
Blown thro' sad towns where some dead king goes by,
Made music in the chambers of his heart,
Swept by the mighty memory of the past.
Nor spake the sorrowful Queen, nor from deep muse
Unbent the grieving beauty of her brows,
But held her heart's proud pain superbly still.

But when he lifted up his looks, it seem'd
Something of sadness in the ancient place,
Like dying breath from lips beloved of yore,
Or unforgotten touch of tender hands
After long years, upon his spirit fell.
For near the carven casement hung the bird,
With hood and jess, that oft had led them forth,
These lovers, thro' the heart of ripling woods
At morning, in the old and pleasant time.
And o'er the broider'd canopies of state
Blazed Uther's dragons, curious, wrought with gems.
Then to his mind that dear and distant dawn
Came back, when first, a boy at Arthur's court,
He paused abasht before the youthful Queen.
And, feeling now her long imploring gaze
Holding him in its sorrow, when he mark'd
How changed her state, and all unlike to her,
The most renownëd beauty of the time,
And pearl of chivalry, for whom himself
All on a summer's day broke, long of yore

A hundred lances in the field, he sprang
And caught her hand, and, falling to one knee,
Arch'd all his haughty neck to a quick kiss.
And there was silence. Silently the West
Grew red and redder, and the day declined.

As o'er the hungering heart of some deep sea,
That swells against the planets and the moon
With sad continual strife and vain unrest,
In silence rise and roll the labouring clouds
That bind the thunder, o'er the heaving heart
Of Guenevere all sorrows fraught with love,
All stormy sorrows, in that silence pass'd.
And like a star in that tumultuous night
Love wax'd and waned, and came and went, changed hue,
And was and was not: till the cloud came down,
And all her soul dissolved in showers: and love
Rose thro' the broken storm: and, with a cry
Of passion sheath'd in sharpest pain, she stretch'd
Wide her warm arms: she rose, she reel'd, and fell
(All her great heart unqueen'd) upon the breast
Of Launcelot; and, lifting up her voice,
She wept aloud "Unhappy that I am,"
She wept, "Unhappy! Would that I had died
Long since, long ere I loved thee Launcelot!
Would I had died long since! ere I had known
This pain, which hath become my punishment,
To have thirsted for the sea: to have received
A drop no bigger than a drop of dew!
I have done ill," she wept, "I am forlorn,
Forlorn! I falter where I stood secure:
The tower I built is fall'n, is fall'n: the staff
I lean'd upon hath broken in my hand.
And I, disrobed, dethroned, discrown'd, and all undone,
Survive my kingdom, widow'd of all rule,
And men shall mock me for a foolish Queen.
For now I see thy love for me is dead,

Dead that brief love which was the light of life,
And all is dark: and I have lived too long.
For how henceforth, unhappy, shall I bear
To dwell among these halls where we have been?
How keep these chambers emptied of thy voice?
The walks where we have linger'd long ago,
The gardens and the places of our love,
Which shall recall the days that come no more,
And all the joy which has been?"
Thus o'erthrown,
And on the breast of Launcelot weeping wild—
Weeping and murmuring—hung Queen Guenevere.
But, while she wept, upon her brows and lips
Warm kisses fell, warm kisses wet with tears.
For all his mind was melted with remorse,
And all his scorn was kill'd, and all his heart
Gave way in that caress, and all the love
Of happier years roll'd down upon his soul
Redoubled; and he bow'd his head, and cried,

"Tho' thou be variable as the waves,
More sharp than winds among the Hebrides
That shut the frozen Spring in stormy clouds,
As wayward as a child, and all unjust,
Yet must I love thee in despite of pain,
Thou peerless Queen of perfect love! Thou star
That draw'st all tides! Thou goddess far above
My heart's weak worship! so adored thou art,
And I so irretrievably all thine!
But now I will arise, as thou hast said,
And join the King: and these thine enemies
Shall know thee not defenceless any more.
For, either, living, I yet hold my life
To arm for thine, or, dying, by my death
Will steep love's injured honour in such blood
Shall wash out every stain! And so farewell
Belov'd. Forget me not when I am far,
But in thy prayers and in thine evening thoughts

Remember me: as I, when sundown crowns
The distant hills, and Ave-Mary rings,
Shall pine for thee on ways where thou art not."

So these two lovers in one long embrace,
An agony of reconcilement, hung
Blinded in tears and kisses, lip to lip,
And tranced from past and future, time and space.

But by this time, the beam of the slope day,
Edging blue mountain glooms with sullen gold,
A dying fire, fell mournfully athwart
The purple chambers. In the courts below
The shadow of the keep from wall to wall
Shook his dark skirt: great chimes began to sound,
And swing, and rock in glimmering heights, and roll
A reeling music down: but ere it fell
Faint bells in misty spires adown the vale
Caught it, and bore it floating on to night.

So from that long love-trance the envious time
Reclaim'd them. Then with a great pang he rose,
Like one that pluck'd his heart out from his breast,
And, bitterly unwinding her white arms
From the warm circle of their amorous fold,
Left living on her lips the lingering heat
Of one long kiss: and, gathering strongly back
His pour'd out anguish to his soul, he went.

And the sun set.

Long while she sat alone,
Searching the silence with her fixëd eyes,
While far and farther off o'er distant floors
The intervals of brazen echoes fell.
A changeful light, from varying passions caught,
Flush'd all her stately cheek from white to red
In doubtful alternation, as some star

Changes his fiery beauty : for her blood
Set headlong to all wayward moods of sense,
Stirr'd with swift ebb and flow: till suddenly all
The frozen heights of grief fell loosed, fast, fast,
In cataract over cataract, on her soul.
Then at the last she rose, a reeling shape
That like a shadow sway'd against the wall,
Her slight hand held upon her bosom, and fell
Before the Virgin Mother on her knees.
There, in a halo of the silver shrine,
That touch'd and turn'd to starlight her slow tears,
Below the feet of the pale-pictur'd saint
She lay, pour'd out in prayer.

Meanwhile, without,
A sighing rain from a low fringe of cloud
Whisper'd among the melancholy hills.
The night's dark limits widen'd : far above
The crystal sky lay open : and the star
Of eve, his rosy circlet trembling clear,
Grew large and bright, and in the silver moats,
Between the accumulated terraces,
Tangled a trail of fire : and all was still.

A SUNSET FANCY.

JUST at sunset, I would be
In some isle-garden, where the sea
I look into shall seem more blue
Than those dear and deep eyes do.
And, if anywhere the breeze
Shall have stirr'd the cypress trees,
Straight the yellow light falls thro',
Catching me, for once, at ease;
Just so much as may impinge
Some tall lily with a tinge
Of orange; while, above the wall,

Tumbles downward into view,
(With a sort of small surprise)
One star more among them all,
For me to watch with half-shut eyes.

Or else upon the breezy deck
Of some Felucca; and one speck
'Twixt the crimson and the yellow,
Which may be a little fleck
Of cloud, or gull with outstretcht neck,
To Spezia bound from Cape Circello;
With a sea-song in my ears
Of the bronzëd buccaneers:
While the night is waxing mellow,
And the helmsman slackly steers—
Leaning, talking to his fellow,
Who has oaths for all he hears—
Each thief swarthier than Othello.
Or, in fault of better things,
Close in sound of one who sings
To casements, in a southern city;
Tinkling upon tender strings
Some melodious old love-ditty;
While a laughing lady flings
One rose to him, just for pity.

But I have not any want
Sweeter than to be with you,
When the long light falleth slant,
And heaven turns a darker blue;
And a deeper smile grows thro'
The glance asleep 'neath those soft lashes,
Which the heart it steals into
First inspires and then abashes.
Just to hold your hand—one touch
So light you scarce should feel it such!
Just to watch you leaning o'er
Those window-roses, love, . . . no more.

ASSOCIATIONS.

You know the place is just the same!
The rooks build here: the sandy hill is
Ablaze with broom, as when she came
Across the sea with her new name
To dwell among the moated lilies.

The trifoly is on the walls:
The daisies in the bowling-alley:
The ox at eve lows from the stalls:
At eve the cuckoo, floating, calls,
When foxgloves tremble in the valley.

The iris blows from court to court:
The bald white spider flits, or stays in
The chinks behind the dragonwort:
That Triton still, at his old sport,
Blows bubbles in his broken basin.

The terrace where she used to walk
Still shines at noon between the roses:
The garden paths are blind with chalk:
The dragonfly from stalk to stalk
Swims sparkling blue till evening closes.

Then, just above that long dark copse,
One warm red star comes out, and passes
Westward, and mounts, and mounts, and stops
(Or seems to) o'er the turret-tops,
And lights those lonely casement-glasses.

Sir Ralph still wears that old grim smile.
The staircase creaks as up I clamber
To those still rooms, to muse awhile.
I see the little meadow-stile
As I lean from the great south-chamber.

And Lady Ruth is just as white.
(Ah, still, that face seems strangely like her!)
The lady and the wicked knight—
All just the same—she swoon'd for fright—
And he—his arm still raised to strike her.

Her boudoir—no one enters there:
The very flowers which last she gather'd
Are in the vase; the lute—the chair—
And all things—just as then they were!
Except the jasmins—those are wither'd.

But when along the corridors
The last red pause of day is streaming,
I seem to hear her up the floors:
I seem to see her thro' the doors:
And then I know that I am dreaming.

MEETING AGAIN.

Yes; I remember the white rose. And since then
the young ivy has grown;
From your window we could not reach it, and now
it is over the stone.
We did not part as we meet, Dear. Well, Time
hath his own stern cures!
And Alice's eyes are deeper, and her hair has
grown like yours.

Is our greeting all so strange then? But there's
something here amiss,
When it is not well to speak kindly. And the
olives are ripe by this.
I had not thought you so alter'd. But all is
changed, God knows!
Good-night. It is night so soon now. Look there!
you have dropt your rose.

Nay, I have one that is wither'd and dearer to me.
I came
To say good-night, little Alice. She does not
remember my name.
It is but the damp that is making my head and my
heart ache so.
I never was strong in the old time, as the others
were, you know.

And you'll sleep well, will you not, Darling? The
old words sound so dear!
'Tis the last time I shall use them; you need show
neither anger nor fear.
It is well that you look so cheerful. And is time
so smooth with you?
How foolish I am! Good-night, Dear. And bid
Alice good-night too.

ARISTOCRACY.

To thee be all men heroes: every race
Noble: all women virgins: and each place
A temple: know thou nothing that is base.

THE MERMAIDEN.

He was a Prince with golden hair
(In a palace beside the sea),
And I but a poor Mermaiden—
And how should he care for me?

Last summer I came, in the long blue nights,
To sit in the cool sea-caves:

Last summer he came to count the stars
From his terrace above the waves.

There's nothing so fair in the sea down there
As the light on his golden tresses:
There's nothing so sweet as his voice: ah, nothing
So warm as the warmth of his kisses!

I could not help but love him, love him,
Till my love grew pain to me.
And to-morrow he weds the Princess
In that palace beside the sea.

AT HER CASEMENT.

I AM knee-deep in grass, in this warm June-night,
In the shade here, shut off from the great moonlight.
All alone, at her casement there,
She sits in the light, and she combs her hair.
She shakes it over the carven seat,
And combs it down to her stately feet.
And I watch her, hid in the blue June-night,
Till my soul grows faint with the costly sight.

There's no flaw on that fair fine brow of hers,
As fair and as proud as Lucifer's.
She looks in the glass as she turns her head:
She knows that the rose on her cheek is red:
She knows how her dark eyes shine—their light
Would scarcely be dimm'd tho' I died to-night.

I would that there in her chamber I stood,
Full-face to her terrible beauty: I would
I were laid on her queenly breast, at her lips,
With her warm hair wound thro' my finger-tips,

Draining her soul at one deep-drawn kiss.
And I would be humbly content for this
To die, as is due, before the morn,
Kill'd by her slowly-returning scorn.

A FAREWELL.

BE happy, child. The last wild words are spoken.
To-morrow, mine no more, the world will claim thee.
I blame thee not. But all my life is broken.
Of that brief Past I have no single token.
Never in years to come my lips shall name thee,
Never, child, never!

I will not say "Forget me;" nor those hours
Which were so sweet. Some scent dead leaves retain.
Keep all the flowers I gave thee—all the flowers
Dead, dead! Tho' years on years of life were ours,
As we have met we shall not meet again;
Forever, child, forever!

AN EVENING IN TUSCANY.

LOOK! the sun sets. Now's the rarest
Hour of all the blessed day.
(Just the hour, love, you look fairest!)
Even the snails are out to play.

Cool the breeze mounts, like this Chianti
Which I drain down to the sun.
—There! shut up that old green Dante—
Turn the page, where we begun,

At the last news of Ulysses—
A grand image, fit to close
Just such grand gold eves as this is,
Full of splendour and repose!

So loop up those long bright tresses—
Only, one or two must fall
Down your warm neck Evening kisses
Thro' the soft curls spite of all.

Ah but rest in your still place there!
Stir not—turn not! the warm pleasure
Coming, going in your face there,
And the rose (no richer treasure)

In your bosom, like my love there,
Just half secret and half seen;
And the soft light from above there
Streaming o'er you where you lean,

With your fair head in the shadow
Of that grass hat's glancing brim,
Like a daisy in a meadow
Which its own deep fringes dim.

O you laugh—you cry "What folly!"
Yet you'd scarcely have me wise,
If I judge right, judging wholly
By the secret in your eyes.

But look down now, o'er the city
Sleeping soft among the hills—
Our dear Florence! That great Pitti
With its steady shadow fills

Half the town up: its unwinking
Cold white windows as they glare
Down the long streets, set one thinking
Of the old Dukes who lived there;

And one pictures those strange men so!—
  Subtle brains, and iron thews!
There, the gardens of Lorenzo—
  The long cypress avenues—

Creep up slow the stately hill-side
  Where the merry loungers are.
But far more I love this still side—
  The blue plain you see so far!

Where the shore of bright white villas
  Leaves off faint: the purple breadths
Of the olives and the willows:
  And the gold-rimm'd mountain-widths:

All transfused in slumbrous glory
  To one burning point—the sun!
But up here—slow, cold, and hoary
  Reach the olives, one by one:

And the land looks fresh: the yellow
  Arbute-berries, here and there,
Growing slowly ripe and mellow
  Thro' a flush of rosy hair.

For the Tramontana last week
  Was about: 'Tis scarce three weeks
Since the snow lay, one white vast streak,
  Upon those old purple peaks.

So to-day among the grasses
  One may pick up tens and twelves
Of young olives, as one passes,
  Blown about, and by themselves

Blackening sullen-ripe. The corn too
  Grows each day from green to golden.
The large-eyed windflowers forlorn too
  Blow among it, unbeholden:

Some white, some crimson, others
Purple blackening to the heart.
From the deep wheat-sea, which smothers
Their bright globes up, how they start!

And the small wild pinks from tender
Feather-grasses peep at us:
While above them burns, on slender
Stems, the red gladiolus:

And the grapes are green: this season
They'll be round and sound and true,
If no after-blight should seize on
Those young bunches turning blue.

O that night of purple weather!
(Just before the moon had set)
You remember how together
We walk'd home?—the grass was wet—

The long grass in the Poderé—
With the balmy dew among it:
And that Nightingale—the fairy
Song he sung—O how he sung it!

And the fig-trees had grown heavy
With the young figs white and woolly:
And the fireflies, bevy on bevy
Of soft sparkles, pouring fully

Their warm life thro' trance on trances
Of thick citron-shades behind,
Rose, like swarms of loving fancies
Thro' some rich and pensive mind.

So we reach'd the Logia. Leaning
Faint, we sat there in the shade.
Neither spoke. The night's deep meaning
Fill'd the silence up unsaid.

Hoarsely thro' the Cypress-alley
A Civetta out of tune
Tried his voice by fits. The valley
Lay all dark below the moon.

Until into song you burst out—
That old song I made for you
When we found our rose—the first out
Last sweet Spring-time in the dew.

Well! . . . if things had gone less wildly—
Had I settled down before
There, in England—labour'd mildly—
And been patient—and learn'd more

Of how men should live in London—
Been less happy—or more wise—
Left no great works tried, and undone—
Never look'd in your soft eyes—

I . . . but what's the use of thinking?
There! our Nightingale begins—
Now a rising note—now sinking
Back in little broken rings

Of warm song that spread and eddy—
Now he picks up heart—and draws
His great music, slow and steady,
To a silver-centred pause!

SONG.

THE purple iris hangs his head
On his lean stalk, and so declines.
The spider spills his silver thread
Between the bells of columbines:

An alter'd light in flickering eves
  Draws dews thro' these dim eyes of ours:
  Death walks in yonder waning bowers,
And burns the blistering leaves.
    Ah, well-a-day!
    Blooms overblow:
    Suns sink away:
    Sweet things decay.

The drunken beetle, roused ere night,
  Breaks blundering from the rotting rose,
Flits thro' blue spidery aconite,
And hums, and comes, and goes:
His thick, bewilder'd song receives
  A drowsy sense of grief like ours:
  He hums and hums among the bowers,
And bangs about the leaves.
    Ah, well-a-day!
    Hearts overflow:
    Joy flits away:
    Sweet things decay.

Her yellow stars the jasmin drops
  In mildew'd mosses one by one:
The hollyhocks fall off their tops:
  The lotus-blooms ail white i' the sun:
The freckled fox-glove faints and grieves:
The smooth-paced slumbrous slug devours
  The glewy globes of gorgeous flowers,
And smears the glistering leaves!
    Ah, well-a-day!
    Life leaves us so.
    Love dare not stay.
    Sweet things decay.

From brazen sunflowers, orb and fringe,
  The burning burnish dulls and dies:
Sad Autumn sets a sullen tinge
  Upon the scornful peonies:

The dewy frog limps out, and heaves
A speckled lump in speckled bowers:
A reeking moisture, clings, and lowers
The lips of lapping leaves.
Ah, well-a-day!
Ere the cock crow,
Life's charm'd array
Reels all away.

SEA-SIDE SONGS.

I.

Drop down below the orbëd sea,
O lingering light in glowing skies,
And bring my own true-love to me—
My dear true-love across the sea—
With tender-lighted eyes.

For now the gates of Night are flung
Wide-open her dark coasts among:
And the happy stars crowd up, and up,
Like bubbles that brighten, one by one,
To the dark wet brim of some glowing cup
Fill'd full to the parting sun.

And moment after moment grows
In grandeur up from deep to deep
Of darkness, till the night hath clomb,
From star to star, heaven's highest dome:
And, like a new thought born in sleep,
The slumbrous glory glows, and glows:
While, far below, a whisper goes
That heaves the happy sea:
For o'er faint tracts of fragrance wide,
A rapture pouring up the tide—
A freshness thro' the heat—a sweet,
Uncertain sound, like fairy feet—
The west wind blows my love to me.

Love-laden from the lighted west
Thou comest, with thy soul opprest
For joy of him: all up the dim,
  Delicious sea blow fearlessly,
Warm wind, that art the tenderest
Of all that breathe from south or west,
  Blow whispers of him up the sea:
Upon my cheek, and on my breast,
And on the lips which he hath prest,
  Blow all his kisses back to me!

Far off, the dark green rocks about,
  All night shines, faint and fair, the far light:
Far off, the lone, late fishers shout
  From boat to boat i' the listening starlight:
Far off, and fair, the sea lies bare,
  Leagues, leagues beyond the reach of rowing:
Up creek and horn the smooth wave swells
  And falls asleep; or, inland flowing,
Twinkles among the silver shells,
From sluice to sluice of shallow wells;
  Or, down dark pools of purple glowing,
Sets some forlorn star trembling there
  In his own dim, dreamlike brilliancy.
    And I feel the dark sails growing
  Nearer, clearer, up the sea:
    And I catch the warm west blowing
  All my own love's sighs to me:
On the deck I hear them singing
  Songs they sing in my own land:
Lights are swinging: bells are ringing:
  On the deck I see him stand!

II.

The day is down into his bower:
  In languid lights his feet he steeps:

The flusht sky darkens, low and lower,
  And closes on the glowing deeps.

In creeping curves of yellow foam
  Up shallow sands the waters slide:
And warmly blow what whispers roam
  From isle to isle the lullëd tide:

The boats are drawn: the nets drip bright:
  Dark casements gleam: old songs are sung:
And out upon the verge of night
  Green lights from lonely rocks are hung.

O winds of eve that somewhere rove
  Where darkest sleeps the distant sea,
Seek out where haply dreams my love,
  And whisper all her dreams to me!

THE SUMMER-TIME THAT WAS.

The swallow is not come yet;
  The river banks are brown;
The wood-side walks are dumb yet,
  And dreary is the town.
I miss a face from the window,
  A footstep from the grass;
I miss the boyhood of my heart,
  And the summer-time that was.

How shall I read the books I read,
  Or meet the men I met?
I thought to find her rose-tree dead,
  But it is growing yet.
And the river winds among the flags,
  And the leaf lies on the grass.
But I walk alone. My hopes are gone,
  And the summer-time that was.

ELAYNE LE BLANC.

O THAT sweet season on the April-verge
Of womanhood! When smiles are toucht with tears,
And all the unsolaced summer seems to grieve
With some blind want: when Eden-exiles feel
Their Paradisal parentage, and search
Even yet some fragrance thro' the thorny years
From reachless gardens guarded by the sword.

Then those that brood above the fallen sun,
Or lean from lonely casements to the moon,
Turn round and miss the touching of a hand:
Then sad thoughts seem to be more sweet than
gay ones:
Then old songs have a sound as pitiful
As dead friends' voices, sometimes heard in dreams:
And all a-tiptoe for some great event,
The Present waits, her finger at her lips,
The while the pensive Past with meek pale palms,
Crost (where a child should lie) on her cold breast,
And wistful eyes forlorn, stands mutely by,
Reproaching Life with some unutter'd loss;
And the heart pines, a prison'd Danaë,
Till some God comes, and makes the air all golden!

In such a mood as this, at such an hour
As makes sad thoughts fall saddest on the soul,
She, in her topmost Bower all alone,
High-up among the battlemented roofs,
Lean'd from the lattice, where the road runs by
To Camelot, and in the bulrush beds
The marish river shrinks his stagnant horn.
All round, along the spectral arras, gleam'd
(With faces pale against the dreary light)
Forms of great Queens—the women of old times:
She felt their frowns upon her, and their smiles,
And seem'd to hear their garments rustling near.

Her lute lay idle her love-books among:
And, at her feet, flung by, the broider'd scarf,
And velvet mantle. On the verge of night
She saw a bird float by, and wish'd for wings:
She heard the hoarse frogs quarrel in the marsh:
And now and then, with drowsy song and oar,
Some dim barge sliding slow from bridge to bridge,
Down the white river past, and far behind
Left a new silence. Then she fell to muse
Unto what end she came into this earth
Whose reachless beauty made her heart so sad,
As one that loves, but hopes not, inly ails
In gazing on some fair unloving face.
Anon, there dropt down a great gulf of sky
A star she knew; and as she look'd at it,
Down-drawn thro' her intensity of gaze,
One angry ray fell tangled in her tears,
And dash'd its blinding brightness in her eyes.
She turn'd, and caught her lute, and pensively
Rippled a random music down the strings,
And sang . . .

All night the moonbeams bathe the sward.
There's not an eye to-night in Joyous-Gard
That is not dreaming something sweet. I wake
Because it is more sweet to dream awake:
Dreaming I see thy face upon the lake.

I am come up from far, love, to behold thee,
That hast waited for me so bravely and well
Thy sweet life long (for the Fairies had told thee
I am the Knight that shall loosen the spell)
And to-morrow morn mine arms shall enfold thee:
And to-morrow night . . . . . ah, who can tell?

As the spirit of some dark lake
Pines at nightfall, wild-awake,
For the approaching consummation
Of a great moon he divines

Coming to her coronation
Of the dazzling stars and signs,
So my heart, my heart,
Darkly (ah, and tremblingly !)
Waits in mystic expectation
(From its wild source far apart)
Until it be fill'd with thee—
With the full-orb'd light of thee—
O belovëd as thou art !
With the soft sad smile that flashes
Underneath thy long dark lashes ;
And thy floating raven hair,
From its wreathëd pearls let slip ;
And thy breath, like balmy air ;
And thy warm wet rosy lip,
With my first kiss lingering there ;
Its sweet secret unreveal'd—
Seal'd by me, to me unseal'd ;
And . . . . . but, ah ! she lies asleep
In yon gray stone castle-keep,
On her lids the happy tear ;
And alone I linger here ;
And to-morrow morn the fight ;
And . . . . ah, me ! to-morrow night ?

Here she brake, trembling, off ; and on the lute,
Yet vibrating thro' its melodious nerves,
A great tear plash'd and tinkled. For awhile
She sat and mused ; and, heavily, drop by drop,
Her tears fell down ; then thro' them a slow smile
Stole, full of April-sweetness ; and she sang—
—It was a sort of ballad of the sea :
A song of weather-beaten mariners,
Gray-headed men that had survived all winds
And held a perilous sport among the waves,
Who yet sang on with hearts as bold as when
They clear'd their native harbour with a shout,
And lifted golden anchors in the sun.

Merrily, merrily drove our barks—
Merrily up from the morning beach!
And the brine broke under the prows in sparks;
For a spirit sat high at the helm of each.
We sail'd all day; and, when day was done,
Steer'd after the wake of the sunken sun,
For we meant to follow him out of reach
Till the golden dawn was again begun.

With lifted oars, with shout and song,
Merry mariners all were we!
Every heart beat stout and strong.
Thro' all the world you would not see,
Tho' you should journey wide and long,
A comelier company.
And where, the echoing creeks among,
Merrily, steadily,
From bay to bay our barks did fall,
You might hear us singing, one and all,
A song of the mighty sea.
But, just at twilight, down the rocks
Dim forms troop'd fast, and clearer grew:
For out upon the sea-sand came
The island-people, whom we knew,
And call'd us:—girls with glowing locks;
And sunburnt boys that tend the herd
Far up the vale; gray elders too
With silver beards:—their cries we heard:
They call'd us, each one by his name.

"Could ye not wait a little while,"
We heard them sing, "for all our sakes?
A little while, in this old isle,"
They sung, "among the silver lakes?
For here," they sung, "from horn to horn
Of flowery bays the land is fair:
The hill-side glows with grapes: the corn
Grows golden in the vale down there.
Our maids are sad for you," they sung:

"Against the field no sickle falls:
Upon the trees our harps are hung:
Our doors are void: and in the stalls
The little foxes nest; among
The herd-roved hills no shepherd calls:
Your brethren mourn for you," they sung.
"Here weep your wives: here pass'd your lives
Among the vines, when you were young:
Here dwell your sires: your household fires
Grow cold. Return! return!" they sung.

Then each one saw his kinsman stand
Upon the shore, and wave his hand:
And each grew sad. But still we sung
Our ocean-chorus bold and clear;
And still upon our oars we hung,
And held our course with steadfast cheer.

"For we are bound for distant shores,"
We cried, and faster swept our oars:
"We pine to see the faces there
Of men whose deeds we heard long since,
Who haunt our dreams: gray heroes: kings
Whose fame the wandering minstrel sings:
And maidens, too, more fair than ours,
With deeper eyes, and softer hair,
Like hers that left her island bowers
To wed the sullen Cornish Prince
Who keeps his court upon the hill
By the gray coasts of Tyntagill,
And each, before he dies, must gain
Some fairy-land across the main."

But still "return, belov'd, return!"
The simple island-people sung:
And still each mariner's heart did burn,
As each his kinsman could discern,
Those dim green rocks among.

"O'er you the rough sea-blasts will blow,"
They sung, "while here the skies are fair:
Our paths are thro' the fields we know:
And yours you know not where."

But we waved our hands ... "farewell! farewell!
We cried .. "our white sails flap the mast:
Our course is set: our oars are wet:
One day" we cried, is "nearly past:
One day at sea! Farewell! farewell!
No more with you we now may dwell!"

And the next day we were driving free
(With never a sail in sight)
Over the face of the mighty sea:
And we counted the stars next night
Rise over us by two and three
With melancholy light:
A grave-eyed, earnest company—
And all round the salt foam white!

With this, she ceased, and sigh'd .. "tho' I were far,
I know yon moated iris would not shed
His purple crown: yon clover-field would ripple
As merry in the waving wind as now:
As soft the Spring down this bare hill would steal,
And in the vale below fling all her flowers:
Each year the wet primroses star the woods:
And violets muffle the sharp rivulets:
Round this lone casement's solitary panes
The wandering ivy move and mount each year:
Each year the red wheat gleam near river-banks:
While, ah, with each my memory from the hearts
Of men would fade, and from their lips my name.
O which were best—the wide, the windy sea,
With golden gleams of undiscover'd lands,
Odours, and murmurs—or the placid Port,
From wanton winds, from scornful waves secure,
Under the old, green, happy hills of home?"

She sat forlorn, and ponder'd. Night was near,
And, marshalling o'er the hills her dewy camps,
Came down the outposts of the sentinel stars.
All in the owlet light she sat forlorn.

Now hostle, hall, and grange, that eve were cramm'd:
The town being choked to bursting of the gates:
For there the King yet lay with all his Earls,
And the Round Table, numbering all save one.

On many a curving terrace which o'erhung
The long gray river, swan-like, thro' the green
Of quaintest yews, moved, pacing stately by,
The lovely ladies of King Arthur's court.
Sighing, she eyed them from that lonely keep.
The Dragon-banners o'er the turrets droop'd,
The heavy twilight hanging in their folds.
And now and then, from posterns in the wall
The Knights stole, lingering for some last Good-night,
Whisper'd or sigh'd thro' closing lattices;
Or paused with reverence of bending plumes,
And lips on jewell'd fingers gayly prest.
The silver cressets shone from pane to pane:
And tapers flitted by with flitting forms:
Clang'd the dark streets with clash of iron heels:
Or fell a sound of coits in clattering courts,
And drowsy horse-boys singing in the straw.

These noises floated upward. And within,
From the great Hall, forever and anon,
Brake gusts of revel; snatches of wild song;
And laughter; where, her sire among his men
Caroused between the twilight and the dark.
The silence round about her where she sat,
Vext in itself, grew sadder for the sound.
She closed her eyes: before them seem'd to float
A dream of lighted revels—dance and song

In Guenver's palace: gorgeous tournaments;
And rows of glittering eyes about the Queen,
(Like stars in galaxies around the moon)
That sparkled recognition down below,
Where rode the Knights amort with lance and plume;
And each his lady's sleeve upon his helm:
Murmuring . . . "none ride for me. Am I not fair,
Whom men call the White Flower of Astolat?"

Far, far without, the wild gray marish spread,
A heron startled from the pools, and flapp'd
The water from his wings, and skirr'd away.
The last long limit of the dying light
Dropp'd, all on fire, behind an iron cloud:
And, here and there, thro' some wild chasm of blue,
Tumbled a star. The mist upon the fens
Thicken'd. A billowy opal grew i' the crofts,
Fed on the land, and suck'd into itself
Paling and park, close copse and bushless down,
Changing the world for Fairies.
Then the moon
In the low east, unprison'd from black bars
Of stagnant fog (a white light, wrought to the full,
Summ'd in a perfect orb) rose suddenly up
Upon the silence with a great surprise,
And took the inert landscape unawares.

White, white, the snaky river: dark the banks:
And dark the folding distance, where her eyes
Were wildly turn'd, as tho' the whole world lay
In that far blackness over Carlyel.
There she espied Sir Launcelot, as he rode
His coal-black courser downward from afar,
For all his armour glitter'd as he went,
And show'd like silver: and his mighty shield,
By dint of knightly combat hackt and worn,
Look'd like some crackt and frozen moon that hangs
By night o'er Baltic headlands all alone.

TO ——

As, in lone fairy-lands, up some rich shelf
Of golden sand the wild wave moaningly
Heaps its unvalued sea-wealth, weed and gem,
Then creeps back slow into the salt sad sea:
So from my life's new searchëd deeps to thee,
Belov'd, I cast these weed-flowers. Smile on them.
More than they mean I know not to express.
So I shrink back into my old sad self,
Far from all words where love lies fathomless.

QUEEN GUENEVERE.

THENCE, up the sea-green floor, among the stems
Of mighty columns whose unmeasured shades
From aisle to aisle, unheeded in the sun,
Moved without sound, I, following all alone
A strange desire that drew me like a hand,
Came unawares upon the Queen.
She sat
In a great silence, which her beauty fill'd
Full to the heart of it, on a black chair
Mail'd all about with sullen gems, and crusts
Of sultry blazonry. Her face was bow'd,
A pause of slumbrous beauty, o'er the light
Of some delicious thought new-risen above
The deeps of passion. Round her stately head
A single circlet of the red gold fine
Burn'd free, from which, on either side stream'd
down
Twilights of her soft hair, from neck to foot.
Green was her kirtle as the emerolde is,
And stiff from hem to hem with seams of stones
Beyond all value; which, from left to right

Disparting, half reveal'd the snowy gleam
Of a white robe of spotless samyte pure.
And from the soft repression of her zone,
Which like a light hand on a lutestring press'd
Harmony from its touch, flow'd warmly back
The bounteous outlines of a glowing grace,
Nor yet outflow'd sweet laws of loveliness.

Then did I feel as one who, much perplext,
Led by strange legends and the light of stars
Over long regions of the midnight sand
Beyond the red tract of the Pyramids,
Is suddenly drawn to look upon the sky
From sense of unfamiliar light, and sees,
Reveal'd against the constellated cope
The great cross of the South.
The chamber round
Was dropt with arras green; and I could hear,
In courts far off, a minstrel praising May,
Who sang . . . *Si douce, si douce est la Margarete!*
To a faint lute. Upon the window-sill,
Hard by a latoun bowl that blazed i' the sun
Perch'd a strange fowl, a Falcon Perigrine;
With all his feathers puft for pride, and all
His courage glittering outward in his eye;
For he had flown from far, athwart strange lands,
And o'er the light of many a setting sun,
Lured by his love (such sovereignty of old
Had Beauty in all coasts of Christendom!)
To look into the great eyes of the Queen.

THE NEGLECTED HEART.

This heart, you would not have,
I laid up in a grave
Of song: with love enwound it;
And set sweet fancies blowing round it.

Then I to others gave it;
Because you would not have it.
"See you keep it well," I said;
"This heart's sleeping—is not dead;
But will wake some future day:
See you keep it while you may."

All great Sorrows in the world,—
Some with crowns upon their heads,
And in regal purple furl'd;
Some with rosaries and beads;
Some with lips of scorning, curl'd
At false Fortune; some, in weeds
Of mourning and of widowhood,
Standing tearful and apart—
Each one in his several mood,
Came to take my heart.

Then in holy ground they set it:
With melodious weepings wet it:
And revered it as they found it,
With wild fancies blowing round it.

And this heart (you would not have)
Being not dead, tho' in the grave,
Work'd miracles and marvels strange,
And heal'd many maladies:
Giving sight to seal'd-up eyes,
And legs to lame men sick for change.

The fame of it grew great and greater.
Then said you "Ah, what's the matter?
How hath this heart, I would not take,
This weak heart, a child might break—
This poor, foolish heart of his—
Since won worship such as this?"

You bethought you then . . . "Ah me
What if this heart, I did not choose

To retain, hath found the key
Of the kingdom? and I lose
A great power? Me he gave it:
Mine the right, and I will have it."

Ah, too late! For crowds exclaim'd
"Ours it is: and hath been claim'd.
Moreover, where it lies, the spot
Is holy ground: so enter not.
None but men of mournful mind—
Men to darken'd days resign'd;
Equal scorn of Saint and Devil;
Poor and outcast; halt and blind;
Exiles from Life's golden revel;
Gnawing at the bitter rind
Of old griefs; or else, confined
In proud cares, to serve and grind,—
May enter: whom this heart shall cure.
But go thou by: thou art not poor:
Nor defrauded of thy lot:
Bless thyself: but enter not!"

APPEARANCES.

Well, you have learn'd to smile.
And no one looks for traces
Of tears about your eyes.
Your face is like most faces.
And who will ask, meanwhile,
If your face your heart belies?

Are you happy? You look so.
Well, I wish you what you seem.
Happy persons sleep so light!
In your sleep you never dream?
But who would care to know
What dreams you dream'd last night?

HOW THE SONG WAS MADE.

I SAT low down, at midnight, in a vale
  Mysterious with the silence of blue pines:
White-cloven by a snaky river-tail,
  Uncoil'd from tangled wefts of silver twines.

Out of a crumbling castle, on a spike
  Of splinter'd rock, a mile of changeless shade
Gorged half the landscape. Down a dismal dyke
  Of black hills the sluiced moonbeams stream'd,
    and staid.

The world lay like a poet in a swoon,
  When God is on him, fill'd with heaven all thro'—
A dim face full of dreams turn'd to the moon,
  With mild lips moist in melancholy dew.

I pluck'd blue mugwort, livid mandrakes, balls
  Of blossom'd nightshade, heads of hemlock, long
White grasses, grown in oozy intervals
  Of marsh, to make ingredients for a song:

A song of mourning to embalm the Past—
  The corpse-cold Past—that it should not decay;
But in dark vaults of memory, to the last,
  Endure unchanged: for in some future day

I will bring my new love to look at it
  (Laying aside her gay robes for a moment)
That, seeing what love came to, she may sit
  Silent awhile, and muse, but make no comment.

RETROSPECTIONS.

TO-NIGHT she will dance at the Palace,
  With the diamonds in her hair:

And the Prince will praise her beauty—
The loveliest lady there!

But tones, at times, in the music
Will bring back forgotten things:
And her heart will fail her sometimes,
When her beauty is praised at the King's.

There sits in his silent chamber
A stern and sorrowful man:
But a strange sweet dream comes to him,
While the lamp is burning wan,

Of a sunset among the vineyards
In a lone and lovely land,
And a maiden standing near him,
With fresh wild-flowers in her hand.

THY VOICE ACROSS MY SPIRIT FALLS.

THY voice across my spirit falls
Like some spent sea-wind thro' dim halls
Of ocean-kings, left bare and wide
(Green floors o'er which the sea-weed crawls!)
Where once, long since, in festal pride
Some Chief, who roved and ruled the tide,
Among his brethren reign'd and died.

I dare not meet thine eyes; for so,
In gazing there, I seem once more
To lapse away thro' days of yore
To homes where laugh and song is o'er,
Whose inmates each went long ago—

Like some lost soul, that keeps the semblance
On its brow of ancient grace
Not all faded, wandering back

To silent chambers, in the track
Of the twilight, from the Place
Of retributive Remembrance.
Ah, turn aside those eyes again!
Their light has less of joy than pain.
We are not now what we were then.

THE RUINED PALACE.

BROKEN are the Palace windows:
Rotting is the Palace floor.
The damp wind lifts the arras,
And swings the creaking door;
But it only startles the white owl
From his perch on a monarch's throne,
And the rat that was gnawing the harpstrings
A Queen once play'd upon.

Dare you linger here at midnight
Alone, when the wind is about,
And the bat, and the newt, and the viper,
And the creeping things come out?
Beware of these ghostly chambers!
Search not what my heart hath been,
Lest you find a phantom sitting
Where once there sat a Queen.

A VISION OF VIRGINS.

I HAD a vision of the night.

It seem'd
There was a long red tract of barren land,
Blockt in by black hills, where a half-moon dream'd
Of morn, and whiten'd.
Drifts of dry brown sand,

This way and that, were heapt below: and flats
Of water:—glaring shallows, where strange bats
Came and went, and moths flicker'd.
To the right,
A dusty road that crept along the waste
Like a white snake: and, further up, I traced
The shadow of a great house, far in sight:
A hundred casements all ablaze with light:
And forms that flit athwart them as in haste:
And a slow music, such as sometimes kings
Command at mighty revels, softly sent
From viol, and flute, and tabor, and the strings
Of many a sweet and slumbrous instrument
That wound into the mute heart of the night
Out of that distance.
Then I could perceive
A glory pouring thro' an open door,
And in the light five women. I believe
They wore white vestments, all of them. They were
Quite calm; and each still face unearthly fair,
Unearthly quiet. So like statues all,
Waiting they stood without that lighted hall;
And in their hands, like a blue star, they held
Each one a silver lamp.
Then I beheld
A shadow in the doorway. And One came
Crown'd for a feast. I could not see the Face.
The Form was not all human. As the flame
Stream'd over it, a presence took the place
With awe.
He, turning, took them by the hand,
And led them each up the white stairway, and
The door closed.

At that moment the moon dipp'd
Behind a rag of purple vapour, ript
Off a great cloud, some dead wind, ere it spent
Its last breath, had blown open, and so rent

You saw behind blue pools of light, and there
A wild star swimming in the lurid air.
The dream was darken'd. And a sense of loss
Fell like a nightmare on the land: because
The moon yet linger'd in her cloud-eclipse.

Then, in the dark, swell'd sullenly across
The waste a wail of women.
Her blue lips
The moon drew up out of the cloud.
Again
I had a vision on that midnight plain.

Five women: and the beauty of despair
Upon their faces: locks of wild wet hair,
Clammy with anguish, wander'd low and loose
O'er their bare breasts, that seem'd too fill'd with trouble
To feel the damp crawl of the midnight dews
That trickled down them. One was bent half-double,
A dismay'd heap, that hung o'er the last spark
Of a lamp slowly dying. As she blew
The dull light redder, and the dry wick flew
In crumbling sparkles all about the dark,
I saw a light of horror in her eyes;
A wild light on her flusht cheek; a wild white
On her dry lips; an agony of surprise
Fearfully fair.
The lamp dropp'd. From my sight
She fell into the dark.
Beside her, sat
One without motion: and her stern face flat
Against the dark sky.
One, as still as death,
Hollow'd her hands about her lamp, for fear
Some motion of the midnight, or her breath,
Should fan out the last flicker. Rosy-clear
The light oozed, thro' her fingers, o'er her face.
There was a ruin'd beauty hovering there

Over deep pain, and, dasht with lurid grace
A waning bloom.
The light grew dim and blear:
And she, too, slowly darken'd in her place.

Another, with her white hands hotly lockt
About her damp knees, muttering madness, rock'd
Forward, and backward. But at last she stopp'd,
And her dark head upon her bosom dropp'd
Motionless.
Then one rose up with a cry
To the great moon; and stretch'd a wrathful arm
Of wild expostulation to the sky,
Murmuring—"These earth-lamps fail us! and what
harm?
Does not the moon shine? Let us rise and haste
To meet the Bridegroom yonder o'er the waste!
For now I seem to catch once more the tone
Of viols on the night. 'Twere better done,
At worst, to perish near the golden gate,
And fall in sight of glory one by one,
Than here all night upon the wild, to wait
Uncertain ills. Away! the hour is late!"

Again the moon dipp'd.
I could see no more.
Not the least gleam of light did heaven afford.

At last, I heard a knocking on a door,
And some one crying "Open to us, Lord!"
There was an awful pause.
I heard my heart
Beat.
Then a Voice—"I know you not. Depart."
I caught, within, a glimpse of glory. And
The door closed.
Still in darkness dream'd the land.
I could not see those women. Not a breath!
Darkness, and awe: a darkness more than death.
The darkness took them. * * * * *

LEOLINE.

In the molten-golden moonlight,
In the deep grass warm and dry,
We watch'd the fire-fly rise and swim
In floating sparkles by.
All night the hearts of nightingales,
Song-steeping, slumbrous leaves,
Flow'd to us in the shadow there
Below the cottage-eaves.

We sang our songs together
Till the stars shook in the skies.
We spoke—we spoke of common things,
Yet the tears were in our eyes.
And my hand—I know it trembled
To each light warm touch of thine.
But we were friends, and only friends,
My sweet friend, Leoline!

How large the white moon look'd, Dear!
There has not ever been
Since those old nights the same great light
In the moons which I have seen.
I often wonder, when I think,
If you have thought so too,
And the moonlight has grown dimmer, Dear,
Than it used to be to you.

And sometimes, when the warm west wind
Comes faint across the sea,
It seems that you have breath'd on it,
So sweet it comes to me:
And sometimes, when the long light wanes
In one deep crimson line,
I muse, "and does she watch it too,
Far off, sweet Leoline?"

And often, leaning all day long
My head upon my hands,
My heart aches for the vanisht time
In the far fair foreign lands:
Thinking sadly—"Is she happy?
Has she tears for those old hours?
And the cottage in the starlight?
And the songs among the flowers?"

One night we sat below the porch,
And out in that warm air,
A fire-fly, like a dying star,
Fell tangled in her hair;
But I kiss'd him lightly off again,
And he glitter'd up the vine,
And died into the darkness
For the love of Leoline!

Between two songs of Petrarch
I've a purple rose-leaf prest,
More sweet than common rose-leaves,
For it once lay in her breast.
When she gave me that her eyes were wet:
The rose was full of dew.
The rose is wither'd long ago:
The page is blister'd too.

There's a blue flower in my garden,
The bee loves more than all:
The bee and I, we love it both,
Tho' it is frail and small.
She loved it too—long, long ago!
Her love was less than mine.
Still we are friends, but only friends,
My lost love, Leoline!

SPRING AND WINTER.

THE world buds every year:
  But the heart just once, and when
The blossom falls off sere
  No new blossom comes again.
Ah, the rose goes with the wind:
But the thorns remain behind.

Was it well in him, if he
  Felt not love, to speak of love so?
If he still unmoved must be,
  Was it nobly sought to move so?
—Pluck the flower, and yet not wear it—
Spurn, despise it, yet not spare it?

Need he say that I was fair,
  With such meaning in his tone,
Just to speak of one whose hair
  Had the same tinge as my own?
Pluck my life up, root and bloom,
Just to plant it on her tomb?

And she'd scarce so fair a face
  (So he used to say) as mine:
And her form had far less grace:
  And her brow was far less fine:
But 'twas just that he loved then
More than he can love again.

Why, if Beauty could not bind him,
  Need he praise me, speaking low:
Use my face just to remind him
  How no face could please him now?
Why, if loving could not move him,
Did he teach me still to love him?

And he said my eyes were bright,
  But his own, he said, were dim;

And my hand, he said, was white,
  But what was that to him?
"For," he said, "in gazing at you,
I seem gazing at a statue."

"Yes!" he said, "he had grown wise now:
  He had suffer'd much of yore:
But a fair face to his eyes now,
  Was a fair face, and no more.
Yet the anguish and the bliss,
And the dream too, had been his."

Then, why talk of "lost romances"
  Being "sick of sentiment!"
And what meant those tones and glances
  If real love was never meant?
Why, if his own youth were wither'd,
Must mine also have been gather'd?

Why those words a thought too tender
  For the common-places spoken?
Looks whose meaning seem'd to render
  Help to words when speech came broken?
Why so late in July moonlight
Just to say what's said by noonlight?

And why praise my youth for gladness
  Keeping something in his smile
Which turn'd all my youth to sadness,
  He still smiling all the while?
Since, when so my youth was over
He said—"Seek some younger lover!"

"For the world buds once a year
  But the heart just once," he said.
True!... so now that Spring is here
  All my flowers, like his, are dead.
And the rose drops in the wind.
But the thorns remain behind.

KING HERMANDIAZ.

THEN, standing by the shore, I saw the moon
Change hue, and dwindle in the west, as when
Warm looks fade inward out of dying eyes,
And the dim sea began to moan.
I knew
My hour had come, and to the bark I went.
Still were the stately decks, and hung with silk
Of stolëd crimson: at the masthead burn'd
A steadfast fire with influence like a star,
And underneath a couch of gold. I loosed
The dripping chain. There was not any wind:
But all at once the magic sails began
To belly and heave, and like a bat that wakes
And flits by night, beneath her swarthy wings
The black ship rock'd, and moved. I heard anon
A humming in the cordage and a sound
Like bees in summer, and the bark went on,
And on, and on, until at last the world
Was roll'd away and folded out of sight,
And I was all alone on the great sea.
There a deep awe fell on my spirit. My wound
Began to bite. I, gazing round, beheld
A Lady sitting silent at the helm,
A woman white as death, and fair as dreams.
I would have asked her "Whither do we sail?"
And "how?" but that my fear clung at my heart,
And held me still. She, answering my doubt,
Said slowly, "To the Isle of Avalon."

And straightway we were nigh a strand all gold,
That glittered in the moon between the dusk
Of hanging bowers made rich with blooms and balms,
From which faint gusts came to me; and I heard
A sound of lutes among the vales, and songs
And voices faint like voices thro' a dream
That said or seem'd to say, "Hail Hermandiaz!"

SONG.

In the warm, black mill-pool winking,
The first doubtful star shines blue:
And alone here I lie thinking
O such happy thoughts of you!

Up the porch the roses clamber,
And the flowers we sow'd last June;
And the casement of your chamber
Shines between them to the moon.

Look out, love! fling wide the lattice:
Wind the red rose in your hair,
And the little white clematis
Which I pluck'd for you to wear:

Or come down, and let me hear you
Singing in the scented grass,
Thro' tall cowslips nodding near you,
Just to touch you as you pass.

For, where you pass, the air
With warm hints of love grows wise:
You—the dew on your dim hair,
And the smile in your soft eyes!

From the hayfield comes your brother;
There, your sisters stand together,
Singing clear to one another
Thro' the dark blue summer weather;

And the maid the latch is clinking,
As she lets her lover thro':
But alone, love, I lie thinking
O such tender thoughts of you!

THE SWALLOW.

O SWALLOW chirping in the sparkling eaves,
  Why hast thou left far south thy fairy homes,
To build between these drenchëd April-leaves,
  And sing me songs of Spring before it comes?
Too soon thou singest! Yon black stubborn thorn
  Bursts not a bud: the sneaping wind drifts on.
She that once flung thee crumbs, and in the morn
  Sang from the lattice where thou sing'st, is gone.
Here is no Spring. Thy flight yet further follow.
Fly off, vain swallow!

Thou com'st to mock me with remember'd things.
  I love thee not, O bird for me too gay.
That which I want thou hast—the gift of wings:
  Grief—which I have—thou hast not. Fly away!
What hath my roof for thee? my cold dark roof,
  Beneath whose weeping thatch thine eggs will freeze!
Summer will halt not here, so keep aloof.
  Others are gone; go thou. In those wet trees
I see no Spring tho' thou still singest of it.
Fare hence, false prophet!

CONTRABAND.

A HEAP of low, dark, rocky coast,
  Where the blue-black sea sleeps smooth and even:
And the sun, just over the reefs at most,
  In the amber part of a pale blue heaven:

A village asleep below the pines,
  Hid up the gray shore from the low slow sun:
And a maiden that lingers among the vines,
  With her feet in the dews, and her locks undone:

The half-moon melting out of the sky ;
And, just to be seen still, a star here, a star there,
Faint, high up in the heart of the heaven ; so high
And so faint, you can scarcely be sure that they
are there.

And one of that small, black, raking craft ;
Two swivel guns on a round deck handy ;
And a great sloop sail with the wind abaft ;
And four brown thieves round a cask of brandy.

That's my life, as I left it last.
And what it may be henceforth I know not.
But all that I keep of the merry Past,
Are trifles like these, which I care to show not :—

A leathern flask, and a necklace of pearl ;
These rusty pistols, this tatter'd chart, Friend :
And the soft dark half of a raven curl ;
And, at evening, the thought of a true, true heart,
Friend.

EVENING.

Already evening ! In the duskiest nook
Of yon dusk corner, under the Death's-head,
Between the alembecs, thrust this legended,
And iron-bound, and melancholy book,
For I will read no longer. The loud brook
Shelves his sharp light up shallow banks thin-
spread ;
The slumbrous west grows slowly red, and red :
Up from the ripen'd corn her silver hook
The moon is lifting : and deliciously
Along the warm blue hills the day declines :
The first star brightens while she waits for me,

And round her swelling heart the zone grows tight:
Musing, half-sad, in her soft hair she twines
The white rose, whispering "he will come to-night!"

ADON.

I WILL not weep for Adon!
I will not waste my breath to draw thick sighs
For spring's dead greenness. All the orient skies
Are husht, and breathing out a bright surprise
Round morning's marshalling star: Rise, Eos, rise!
Day's dazzling spears are up: the faint stars fade on
The white hills—cold, like Adon!

O'er crag, and spar, and splinter
Break down, and roll the amber mist, stern light!
The black pines dream of dawn. The skirts of night
Are ravell'd in the East. And planted bright
In heaven, the roots of ice shine, sharp and white,
In frozen ray, and spar, and spike, and splinter.
Within me, and without, all's winter.

Why should I weep for Adon?
Am I because the sweet Past is no more,
Dead, as the leaves upon the graves of yore?
I will breathe boldly, tho' the air be frore
With freezing fire. Life still beats at the core
Of the world's heart, tho' Death his awe hath laid on
This dumb white corpse of Adon.

THE PROPHET.

When the East lightens with strange hints of morn,
The first tinge of the growing glory takes
The cold crown of some husht high alp forlorn,
While yet o'er vales below the dark is spread.
Even so the dawning Age, in silence, breaks,
O solitary soul, on thy still head:
And we, that watch below with reverent fear,
Seeing thee crown'd, do know that day is near.

WEALTH.

Was it not enough to dream the day to death
  Grandly? and finely feed on faint perfumes?
Between the heavy lilacs draw thick breath,
  While the noon humm'd from glowing citron-glooms?

Or walk with Morning in these dewy bowers,
  'Mid sheavëd lilies, and the moth-loved lips
Of purple asters, bearded flat sunflowers,
  And milkwhite crumpled pinks with blood i' the tips?

But I must also, gazing upon thee,
  Pine with delicious pain, and subtle smart,
Till I felt heavy immortality,
  Laden with looks of thine, weigh on my heart!

WANT.

You swore you lov'd me all last June:
  And now December's come and gone.

The Summer went with you—too soon.
The Winter goes—alone.

Next Spring the leaves will all be green:
But love like ours, once turn'd to pain,
Can be no more what it hath been,
Tho' roses bloom again.

Return, return the unvalued wealth
I gave! which scarcely profits you—
The heart's lost youth—the soul's lost health—
In vain! . . . false friend, adieu!

I keep one faded violet
Of all once ours—you left no more.
What I have lost I may forget,
But you cannot restore.

A BIRD AT SUNSET.

WILD bird, that wingest wide the glimmering moors,
Whither, by belts of yellowing woods away?
What pausing sunset thy wild heart allures
Deep into dying day?

Would that my heart, on wings like thine, could pass
Where stars their light in rosy regions lose—
A happy shadow o'er the warm brown grass,
Falling with falling dews!

Hast thou, like me, some true-love of thine own,
In fairy lands beyond the utmost seas;
Who there, unsolaced, yearns for thee alone,
And sings to silent trees?

O tell that woodbird that the summer grieves,
And the suns darken and the days grow cold;
And, tell her, love will fade with fading leaves,
And cease in common mould.

Fly from the winter of the world to her!
Fly happy bird! I follow in thy flight,
Till thou art lost o'er yonder fringe of fir
In baths of crimson light.

My love is dying far away from me.
She sits and saddens in the fading west.
For her I mourn all day, and pine to be
At night upon her breast.

IN TRAVEL.

Now our white sail flutters down:
Now it broadly takes the breeze:
Now the wharves upon the town,
Lessening, leave us by degrees.
Blithely blows the morning, shaking
On your cheek the loosen'd curls:
Round our prow the cleft wave, breaking,
Tumbles off in heapëd pearls,
Which in forks of foam unite,
And run seething out to sea,
Where o'er gleams of briny light,
Dip the dancing gulls in glee.
Now the mountain serpentine
Slips out many a snaky line
Down the dark blue ocean-spine.
From the boatside, while we pass,
I can see, as in a glass,
Pirates on the flat sea-sand,
Carousing ere they put from land;

And the purple-pointed crests
Of hills whereon the morning rests,
Whose ethereal vivid peaks
Glimmer in the lucid creeks.
Now these wind away; and now
Hamlets up the mountain-brow
Peep and peer from roof to roof;
And gray castle-walls aloof
O'er wide vineyards just in grape,
From whose serfs old Barons held
Tax and toll in feudal eld,
Creep out of the uncoiling cape.
Now the long low layer of mist
A slow trouble rolls and lifts,
With a broken billowy motion,
From the rocks and from the rifts;
Laying bare, just here and there,
Black stone-pines, at morn dew-kist
By salt winds from bound to bound
Of the great sea freshening round;
Wattled folds on bleak brown downs
Sloping high o'er sleepy towns;
Lengths of shore and breadths of ocean.

Love, lean here upon my shoulder,
And look yonder, love, with me:
Now I think that I can see
In the merry market-places
Sudden warmths of sunny faces:
Many a lovely laughing maiden
Bearing on her loose dark locks
Rich fruit-baskets heavy-laden,
In and out among the rocks,
Knowing not that we behold her.
Now, love, tell me can you hear,
Growing nearer, and more near,
Sound of song, and plash of oar,
From wild bays, and inlets hoar,
While above yon isles afar
Ghostlike sinks last night's last star?

CHANGES.

WHOM first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And Life, indeed, is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead.
And then, we women cannot choose our lot.

Much must be borne which it is hard to bear:
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
God help us all! who need, indeed His care.
And yet, I know, the Shepherd loves his sheep.

My little boy begins to babble now
Upon my knee his earliest infant prayer.
He has his father's eager eyes, I know.
And, they say too, his mother's sunny hair.

But when he sleeps and smiles upon my knee,
And I can feel his light breath come and go,
I think of one (Heaven help and pity me!)
Who loved me, and whom I loved, long ago.

Who might have been . . . ah, what I dare not think!
We all are changed. God judges for us best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in heaven humbly for the rest.

But blame us women not, if some appear
Too cold at times; and some too gay and light.
Some griefs gnaw deep. Some woes are hard to bear.
Who knows the Past? and who can judge us right?

Ah, were we judged by what we might have been,
And not by what we are, too apt to fall!
My little child—he sleeps and smiles between
These thoughts and me. In heaven we shall know all!

JUDICIUM PARIDIS.

I SAID, when young, "Beauty's the supreme joy.
Her I will choose, and in all forms will face her;
Eye to eye, lip to lip, and so embrace her
With my whole heart." I said this being a boy.

"First, I will seek her—naked, or clad only
In her own god-head, as I know of yore
Great bards beheld her." So by sea and shore
I sought her, and among the mountains lonely.

"There be great sunsets in the wondrous West;
And marvel in the orbings of the moon;
And glory in the jubilees of June;
And power in the deep ocean. For the rest,

"Green-glaring glaciers; purple clouds of pine;
White walls of ever-roaring cataracts;
Blue thunder drifting over thirsty tracts;
The homes of eagles; these, too, are divine,

"And terror shall not daunt me—so it be
Beautiful—or in storm or in eclipse:
Rocking pink shells, or wrecking freighted ships,
I shall not shrink to find her in the sea.

"Next, I will seek her—in all shapes of wood,
Or brass, or marble; or in colours clad;
And sensuous lines, to make my spirit glad.
And she shall change her dress with every mood.

"Rose-latticed casements, lone in summer lands—
Some witch's bower: pale sailors on the marge
Of magic seas, in an enchanted barge
Stranded, at sunset, upon jewell'd sands:

"White nymphs among the lilies: shepherd kings:
And pink-hoov'd Fawns: and moon'd Endymions:
From every channel thro' which Beauty runs
To fertilize the world with lovely things

"I will draw freely, and be satisfied.
Also, all legends of her apparition
To men, in earliest times, in each condition,
I will inscribe on portraits of my bride.

"Then, that no single sense of her be wanting,
Music; and all voluptuous combinations
Of sound, with their melodious palpitations
To charm the ear, the cells of fancy haunting.

"And in her courts my life shall be outroll'd
As one unfurls some gorgeous tapestry,
Wrought o'er with old Olympian heraldry,
All purple-woven stiff with blazing gold.

"And I will choose no sight for tears to flow:
I will not look at sorrow: I will see
Nothing less fair and full of majesty
Than young Apollo leaning on his bow.

"And I will let things come and go: nor range
For knowledge: but from moments pluck delight:
The while the great days ope and shut in light,
And wax and wane about me, rich with change.

"Some cup of dim hills, where a white moon lies,
Dropt out of weary skies without a breath,
In a great pool: a slumb'rous vale beneath:
And blue damps prickling into white fire-flies:

"Some sunset vision of an Oread, less
Than half an hour ere moonrise caught asleep
With a flusht cheek, among crusht violets deep—
A warm half-glimpse of milk-white nakedness,

"On sumptuous summer eves: shall wake for me
Rapture from all the various stops of life;
Making it like some charm'd Arcadian fife
Fill'd by a wood-god with his ecstasy."

These things I said while I was yet a boy,
And the world show'd as between dream and waking
A man may see the face he loves. So, breaking
Silence, I cried . . . "Thou art the supreme Joy!"

My spirit, as a lark hid near the sun,
Caroll'd at morning. But ere she had dropt
Half down the rainbow-colour'd years that propp'd
Her gold cloud up, and broadly, one by one,

The world's great harvest-lands broke on her eye,
She changed her tone, . . . "What is it I may keep?
For look here, how the merry reapers reap:
Even children glean: and each puts something by.

"The pomps of morning pass: when evening comes,
What is retain'd of these which I may show?
If for the hills I leave the fields below
I fear to die an exile from men's homes.

"Tho' here I see the orient pageants pass,
I am not richer than the merest hind
That toils below, all day, among his kind,
And clinks at eve glad horns in the dry grass."

Then, pondering long, at length I made confession.
"I have err'd much, rejecting all that man did:
For all my pains I shall go empty-handed:
And Beauty, of its nature foils possession."

Thereafter, I said . . . " Knowledge is most fair.
Surely to know is better than to see.
To see is loss : to know is gain : and we
Grow old. I will store thriftily, with care."

In which mood I endured for many years,
Valuing all things for their further uses :
And seeking knowledge at all open sluices :
Tho' oft the stream turn'd brakish with my tears.

Yet not the less, for years in this same mood
I rested : nor from any object turn'd
That had its secret to be spell'd and learn'd,
Murmuring ever " Knowledge is most good."

Unto which end I shunn'd the revelling
And ignorant crowd, that eat the fruits and die :
And call'd out Plato from his century
To be my helpmate : and made Homer sing.

Until the awful Past in gather'd heaps
Weigh'd on my brain, and sunk into my soul,
And sadden'd thro' my nature, till the whole
Of life was darken'd downward to the deeps.

And, wave on wave, the melancholy ages
Crept o'er my spirit : and the years displaced
The landmarks of the days : life waned, effaced
From action by the sorrows of the sages :

And my identity became at last
The record of those others : or, if more,
A hollow shell the sea sung in : a shore
Of footprints which the waves wash'd from it fast.

And all was as a dream whence, holding breath,
It seem'd, at times, just possible to break
By some wild nervous effort, with a shriek,
Into the real world of life and death.

But that thought saved me. Thro' the dark I scream'd
Against the darkness, and the darkness broke,
And broke that nightmare: back to life I woke,
Tho' weary with the dream which I had dream'd.

O life! life! life! With laughter and with tears
I tried myself: I knew that I had need
Of pain to prove that this was life indeed,
With its warm privilege of hopes and fears.

O Love of man made Life of man, that saves!
O man, that standest looking on the light:
That standest on the forces of the night:
That standest up between the stars and graves!

O man! by man's dread privilege of pain,
Dare not to scorn thine own soul nor thy brother's:
Tho' thou be more or less than all the others.
Man's life is all too sad for man's disdain.

The smiles of seraphs are less awful far
Than are the tears of this humanity,
That sound, in dropping, thro' Eternity,
Heard in God's ear beyond the furthest star.

If that be true—the hereditary hate
Of Love's lost Rebel, since the worlds began,—
The very Fiend, in hating, honours Man:
Flattering with Devil-homage Man's estate.

If two Eternities, at strife for us,
Around each human soul wage silent war,
Dare we disdain ourselves, tho' fall'n we are,
With Hell and Heaven looking on us thus?

Whom God hath loved, whom Devils dare not
scorn,
Despise not thou—the meanest human creature.
Climb, if thou canst, the heights of thine own
nature,
And look toward Paradise where each was born.

So I spread sackcloth on my former pride:
And sat down, clothed and cover'd up with
shame:
And cried to God to take away my blame
Among my brethren: and to these I cried

To come between my crime and my despair,
That they might help my heart up, when God
sent
Upon my soul its proper punishment,
Lest that should be too great for me to bear.

And so I made my choice: and learn'd to live
Again, and worship, as my spirit yearn'd:
So much had been admired—so much been
learn'd—
So much been given me—O, how much to give!

Here is the choice, and now the time, O chooser!
Endless the consequence tho' brief the choice.
Echoes are waked down ages by thy voice:
Speak: and be thou the gainer or the loser.

And I bethought me long . . . "Tho' garners split,
If none but thou be fed art thou more full?"
For surely Knowledge and the Beautiful
Are human; must have love, or die for it!

To Give is better than to Know or See:
And both are means: and neither is the end:
Knowing and seeing, if none call thee friend,
Beauty and knowledge have done nought for thee.

Tho' I at Aphroditë all day long
  Gaze until sunset with a thirsty eye,
  I shall not drain her boundless beauty dry
By that wild gaze: nor do her fair face wrong.

For who gives, giving, doth win back his gift:
  And knowledge by division grows to more:
  Who hides the Master's talent shall die poor,
And starve at last of his own thankless thrift.

I did this for another: and, behold!
  My work hath blood in it: but thine hath none:
  Done for thyself, it dies in being done:
To what thou buyest thou thyself art sold.

Give thyself utterly away. Be lost.
  Choose some one, something: not thyself, thine own:
  Thou canst not perish: but, thrice greater grown—
Thy gain the greatest where thy loss was most—

Thou in another shalt thyself new-find.
  The single globule, lost in the wide sea,
  Becomes an ocean. Each identity
Is greatest in the greatness of its kind.

Who serves for gain, a slave, by thankless pelf
  Is paid: who gives himself is priceless, free.
  I give myself, a man, to God: lo, He
Renders me back a saint unto myself!

NIGHT.

Come to me, not as once thou camest, Night!
With light and splendour up the gorgeous West;
Easing the heart's rich sense of thee with sighs
Sobb'd out of all emotion on Love's breast;
While the dark world waned wavering into rest,
Half seen athwart the dim delicious light
Of languid eyes:

But softly, soberly; and dark—more dark!
Till my life's shadow lose itself in thine.
Athwart the light of slowly-gathering tears,
That come between me and the starlight, shine
From distant melancholy deeps divine,
While day slips downward thro' a rosy arc
To other spheres.

SONG.

Flow, freshly flow,
Dark stream, below!
While stars grow light above:
By willowy banks, thro' lonely downs,
Past terraced walls in silent towns,
And bear me to my love!

Still. as we go,
Blow, gently blow,
Warm wind, and blithely move
These dreamy sails, that slowly glide—
A shadow on the shining tide
That bears me to my love.

Fade, sweetly fade
In dewy shade
On lonely grange and grove,
O lingering day! and bring the night
Thro' all her milk-white mazes bright
That tremble o'er my love.

The sunset wanes
From twinkling panes.
Dim, misty myriads move
Down glimmering streets. One light I see—
One happy light, that shines for me,
And lights me to my love!

FORBEARANCE.

Call me not, Love, unthankful, or unkind,
That I have left my heart with thee, and fled:
I were not worth that wealth which I resign'd,
Had I not chosen poverty instead.

Grant me but solitude! I dare not swerve
From my soul's law—a slave, tho' serving thee.
I but forbear more grandly to deserve:
The free gift only cometh of the free.

THE END.

BOOKS IN BLUE AND GOLD,

PUBLISHED BY

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

☞ Sent free of postage on receipt of price. ☜

LONGFELLOW'S PROSE WORKS. 2 vols. $1.75.

LONGFELLOW'S POETICAL WORKS. 2 vols. $1.75.

LOWELL'S POETICAL WORKS. 2 vols. $1.50.

TENNYSON'S POETICAL WORKS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

PERCIVAL'S POETICAL WORKS. 2 vols. $1.75.

MOTHERWELL'S POETICAL WORKS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

OWEN MEREDITH'S POETICAL WORKS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

WHITTIER'S POETICAL WORKS. 2 vols. $1.50.

LEIGH HUNT'S POETICAL WORKS. 2 vols. $1.50

GERALD MASSEY'S POETICAL WORKS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

BOWRING'S MATINS AND VESPERS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S LOVES OF THE POETS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S DIARY OF AN ENNUYEE. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S SKETCHES OF ART. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S MEMOIRS OF ITALIAN PAINTERS. 1 vol. 75 cents.

MRS. JAMESON'S STUDIES AND STORIES. 1 vol. 75 cents

DATE DUE

APR 3 0 [illegible]			
GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.

PR4950 .E68
Poems
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00071 7332